

SON OF HAMAS

MOSAB HASSAN YOUSEF

WITH RON BRACKIN



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Son of Hamas: A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue, and Unthinkable Choices

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*To my beloved father and my wounded family
To the victims of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict
To every human life my Lord has saved*

My family, I am very proud of you; only my God can understand what you have been through. I realize that what I have done has caused another deep wound that might not heal in this life and that you may have to live with its shame forever.

I could have been a hero and made my people proud of me. I knew what kind of hero they were looking for: a fighter who dedicated his life and family to the cause of a nation. Even if I was killed, they would have told my story for generations to come and been proud of me forever, but in reality, I would not have been much of a hero.

Instead, I became a traitor in the eyes of my people. Although I once brought pride to you, I now bring you only shame. Although I was once the royal prince, I am now a stranger in a foreign country fighting against the enemy of loneliness and darkness.

I know you see me as a traitor; please understand it was not you I chose to betray, but your understanding

of what it means to be a hero. When Middle Eastern nations—Jews and Arabs alike—start to understand some of what I understand, only then will there be peace. And if my Lord was rejected for saving the world from the punishment of hell, I don't mind being a reject!

I don't know what the future holds, but I do know that I am not afraid. And now I want to give you something that has helped me to survive so far: all the guilt and shame I have carried for all these years is a small price to pay if it saves even one innocent human life.

How many people appreciate what I have done? Not so many. But that's okay. I believed in what I did and I still believe, which is my only fuel for this long journey. Every drop of innocent blood that has been saved gives me hope to carry on to the last day.

I paid, you paid, and yet the bills of war and peace continue to come. God be with us all and give us what we need to carry this heavy weight.

With love,

Your son

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ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES



A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

TIME IS SEQUENTIAL—a thread spanning the distance between birth and death.

Events, however, are more like a Persian carpet—thousands of richly colored threads woven into intricate patterns and images. Any attempt to place events into purely chronological order would be like pulling the threads loose and laying them end to end. It might be simpler, but you would lose the design.

The events in this book are my best recollections, sorted out from the maelstrom of my life in the occupied territories of Israel and woven together as they occurred—consecutively and concurrently.

To provide you with reference points and to sort out the Arabic names and terms, I have included a brief time line in the appendices, along with a glossary and a list of players.

For security reasons, I have intentionally omitted much of the detail from the accounts of sensitive operations conducted by the Israel Security Agency, the Shin Bet. The information revealed in this book in no way jeopardizes the ongoing global war on terrorism in which Israel plays a leading role.

Finally, *Son of Hamas*, like the Middle East, is a continuing story. So I invite you to keep in touch by visiting my blog at <http://www.sonofhamas.com>, where I share my insights on breaking regional developments. I also post updates on what the Lord is doing with the book and in my family and where he is leading me today.

—MHY

PREFACE

PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST has been the holy grail of diplomats, prime ministers, and presidents for more than five decades. Every new face on the world stage thinks he or she is going to be the one to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. And each one fails just as miserably and completely as those who have come before.

The fact is, few Westerners can come close to understanding the complexities of the Middle East and its people. But I do—by virtue of a most unique perspective. You see, I am a son of that region and of that conflict. I am a child of Islam and the son of an accused terrorist. I am also a follower of Jesus.

Before the age of twenty-one, I saw things no one should ever see: abject poverty, abuse of power, torture, and death. I witnessed the behind-the-scenes dealings of top Middle Eastern leaders who make headlines around the world. I was trusted at the highest levels of Hamas, and I participated in the so-called Intifada. I was held captive in the bowels of Israel's most feared prison facility. And as you will see, I made choices that have made me a traitor in the eyes of people I love.

My unlikely journey has taken me through dark places and given me access to extraordinary secrets. On the pages of this book

I finally reveal some of those long-hidden secrets, exposing events and processes that to this point have been known only by a handful of shadowy individuals.

The uncovering of these truths will likely send shock waves through parts of the Middle East, but I hope it will also bring comfort and closure to the families of many victims of this unending conflict.

As I move among Americans today, I find that many of them have a lot of questions about the Arab-Israeli conflict, but very few answers and even less good information. I hear questions like:

- “Why can’t people just get along in the Middle East?”
- “Who is in the right—the Israelis or the Palestinians?”
- “To whom does the land really belong? Why don’t Palestinians just move to other Arab countries?”
- “Why doesn’t Israel give back the land and property it won in the 1967 Six-Day War?”
- “Why are so many Palestinians still living in refugee camps? Why don’t they have their own state?”
- “Why do Palestinians hate Israel so much?”
- “How can Israel protect itself from suicide bombers and frequent rocket attacks?”

These are good questions, all of them. But none of them touch on the real issue, the root problem. The current conflict stretches all the way back to the animosity between Sarah and Hagar described in the first book of the Bible. To understand the political and cultural realities, however, you really don’t have to look much further than the aftermath of World War I.

When the war ended, the Palestinian territories, national home of the Palestinian people for centuries, fell under the mandate of Great Britain. And the British government had an unusual notion

for the area, which it stated in the Balfour Declaration of 1917: “His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”

Encouraged by the British government, hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants, mostly from Eastern Europe, flooded into the Palestinian territories. Clashes between Arabs and Jews were inevitable.

Israel became a state in 1948. However, the Palestinian territories remained just that—nonsovereign territories. Without a constitution to maintain some semblance of order, religious law becomes the highest authority. And when everyone is free to interpret and enforce the law as he sees fit, chaos ensues. To the outside world, the Middle Eastern conflict is simply a tug-of-war over a small stretch of land. But the real problem is that no one yet has understood the real problem. And as a result, negotiators from Camp David to Oslo confidently continue to splint the arms and legs of a cardiac patient.

Please understand, I did not write this book because I think I’m smarter or wiser than the great thinkers of the age. I am not. But I believe that God has given me a unique perspective by placing me on multiple sides of an apparently insoluble conflict. My life has been partitioned like the crazy little piece of real estate on the Mediterranean known as Israel by some, Palestine by others, and the occupied territories by still others.

My purpose in the pages that follow is to set the record straight on some key events, lay bare some secrets, and if all goes well, leave you with hope that the impossible can be accomplished.

Chapter One

CAPTURED

1996

I STEERED MY LITTLE WHITE SUBARU around a blind corner on one of the narrow roads that led to the main highway outside the West Bank city of Ramallah. Stepping lightly on the brake, I slowly approached one of the innumerable checkpoints that dot the roads running to and from Jerusalem.

“Turn off the engine! Stop the car!” someone shouted in broken Arabic.

Without warning, six Israeli soldiers jumped out of the bushes and blocked my car, each man carrying a machine gun, and each gun pointed directly at my head.

Panic welled up in my throat. I stopped the car and threw the keys through the open window.

“Get out! Get out!”

Wasting no time, one of the men jerked open the door and threw me to the dusty ground. I barely had time to cover my head before the beating began. But even as I tried to protect my face, the heavy boots of the soldiers quickly found other targets: ribs, kidneys, back, neck, skull.

Two of the men dragged me to my feet and pulled me to the checkpoint, where I was forced onto my knees behind a cement

barricade. My hands were bound behind my back with a sharp-edged plastic zip tie that was cinched much too tight. Somebody blindfolded me and shoved me into the back of a jeep onto the floor. Fear mingled with anger as I wondered where they were taking me and how long I would be gone. I was barely eighteen years old and only a few weeks away from my final high school exams. What was going to happen to me?

After a fairly short drive, the jeep slowed to a halt. A soldier pulled me from the back and removed my blindfold. Squinting in the bright sunlight, I realized that we were at Ofer Army Base. An Israeli defense base, Ofer was one of the largest and most secure military facilities in the West Bank.

As we moved toward the main building, we passed by several armored tanks, which were shrouded by canvas tarps. The monstrous mounds had always intrigued me whenever I had seen them from outside the gates. They looked like huge, oversized boulders.

Once inside the building, we were met by a doctor who gave me a quick once-over, apparently to make sure I was fit to withstand interrogation. I must have passed because, within minutes, the handcuffs and blindfold were replaced, and I was shoved back into the jeep.

As I tried to contort my body so that it would fit into the small area usually reserved for people's feet, one beefy soldier put his boot squarely on my hip and pressed the muzzle of his M16 assault rifle into my chest. The hot reek of petrol fumes saturated the floor of the vehicle and forced my throat closed. Whenever I tried to adjust my cramped position, the soldier jabbed the gun barrel deeper into my chest.

Without warning, a searing pain shot through my body and made my toes clench. It was as if a rocket were exploding in my skull. The force of the blow had come from the front seat, and I realized that one of the soldiers must have used his rifle butt to hit me in the head. Before I had time to protect myself, however, he hit me again, harder

this time and in the eye. I tried to move out of reach but the soldier who had been using me for a footstool dragged me upright.

“Don’t move or I *will* shoot you!” he shouted.

But I couldn’t help it. Each time his comrade hit me, I involuntarily recoiled from the impact.

Under the rough blindfold, my eye was beginning to swell closed, and my face felt numb. There was no circulation in my legs. My breathing came in shallow gasps. I had never felt such pain. But worse than the physical pain was the horror of being at the mercy of something merciless, something raw and inhuman. My mind reeled as I struggled to understand the motives of my tormentors. I understood fighting and killing out of hatred, rage, revenge, or even necessity. But I had done nothing to these soldiers. I had not resisted. I had done everything I was told to do. I was no threat to them. I was bound, blindfolded, and unarmed. What was inside these people that made them take such delight in hurting me? Even the basest animal kills for a reason, not just for sport.

I thought about how my mother was going to feel when she learned that I had been arrested. With my father already in an Israeli prison, I was the man of the family. Would I be held in prison for months and years as he had been? If so, how would my mother manage with me gone too? I began to understand how my dad felt—worried about his family and grieved by the knowledge that we were worrying about him. Tears sprang to my eyes as I imagined my mother’s face.

I also wondered if all my years of high school were about to be wasted. If I indeed was headed for an Israeli prison, I would miss my final exams next month. A torrent of questions and cries raced through my mind even as the blows continued to fall: *Why are you doing this to me? What have I done? I am not a terrorist! I’m just a kid. Why are you beating me like this?*

I’m pretty sure I passed out several times, but every time I came to, the soldiers were still there, hitting me. I couldn’t dodge the blows.

The only thing I could do was scream. I felt bile rising in the back of my throat and I gagged, vomiting all over myself.

I felt a deep sadness before losing consciousness. Was this the end? Was I going to die before my life had really even started?