

Crisis of Conscience: Anti-Semite Learns He's a Jew

What do you do when you learn you are not the person you thought you were, when you learn you are the very thing you hated?

It was a question Csanad Szegedi was confronted with—one that led to a remarkable transformation.

Szegedi was once a rising star in Hungary's third largest and most controversial political parties, Jobbik. Jobbik has been labeled fascist and anti-Semitic.

Its leader once asked for a list of all the Jews in Hungarian government. And Szegedi, still in his 20s, was on a trajectory to lead the party someday.

"I joined Jobbik in 2003, when the party foundations were being built," he told CBN News. "I was a member for nine years. I was vice president for six years, and I have served in the European parliament since 2009."

Szegedi was also branded an anti-Semite, although he told CBN News that when he joined Jobbik, "I was kind of indifferent toward Jews."

"I didn't care about Jews," he said. "I didn't care about the Holocaust. I didn't consider the Holocaust as a tragedy for the Hungarian people."

Szegedi's Damascus Road

But still, Szegedi was a leader in a major anti-Semitic party, and his public statements showed that, at the very least, he didn't like Jews and was suspicious of them.

But that would all change when Szegedi learned something about

himself that would turn his world upside down: Szegedi discovered he was a Jew.

When rumors of his Jewish ancestry started swirling on the Internet, Szegedi went to talk to his 94-year-old grandmother, whom he never knew was Jewish.

“She opened up and she talked about her life and how she was sent to Auschwitz and how our family was annihilated,” he recalled. “I was shocked. First of all, because I realized the Holocaust really happened.”

At first, Szegedi tried to hide his Jewishness and act like nothing had happened. But he realized he couldn’t stay in Jobbik.

“It started such a crisis in my consciousness,” he told CBN News. “I realized I can’t take part in any organization that has anything to do with anti-Semitism. And after my Jewish origins were disclosed, they really didn’t want to see me in the party anymore.”

A Spiritual ‘Leper’

So what do you do when you discover you are one of the very things you hated? Szegedi decided to change.

He contacted local rabbi Schlomo Koves, who first thought it was a joke.

“When I first met with Csanad, I had very, very mixed feelings because on one hand I was sitting across from a member of the Jobbik party, which has extreme anti-Semitic views,” Rabbi Koves told CBN News.

“But on the other hand, I was sitting across from a broken person who has realized what he has done and has come to a situation where he figured he had to change but he didn’t know how to change,” he said.

Szegedi started attending synagogue and jokes that he was treated by some members "like a leper."

"It was very interesting to see how other people viewed it, and some stepped back," Rabbi Koves said. "They were shocked."

But Szegedi started taking classes at the synagogue, learning Hebrew and the meaning of kosher and Shabbat. He said his life has completely changed.

"It's changed everything. It's like being reborn, and the changes in my life are still happening," he said. "I had this set value system that I had to change completely. I had had this value system until I was 30, and I had to admit that it was all wrong and to find the will to change."

Visiting Israel

Szegedi also became a politician without a party and has continued to serve in the European parliament as an independent.

"As a politician, now I want to defend human rights for everyone," Szegedi explained. "I am aware of my responsibility, and I know I will have to make it right in the future."

One of the high points of his new life was visiting Israel with his wife and visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum and the Western Wall.

"When I landed in Israel, airport security asked me a lot of questions, and when the guard asked me, 'Are you a Jew?' Then for the first time in my life, I could say, 'Yes,'" Szegedi recalled.

"Just to feel like you are on the right way spiritually, and you can get closer to God," he continued. "It's a whole new feeling for me, that I am doing the right thing."