

Son of Hamas Leader Shares Faith Journey

✖ The son of a Hamas founder whose Christian conversion made international headlines released the complete story of his faith journey Tuesday in a memoir brimming with spy-novel-like drama.

Son of Hamas by Mosab Hassan Yousef details a six-year-long conversion process that originated with a Bible study in Jerusalem and resulted in his departure from the Islamic terrorist organization. He was baptized in 2005 near Tel Aviv in a ceremony performed by a San Diego woman visiting the church that Yousef attended.

The 31-year-old says his faith has sustained him ever since, particularly since leaving his homeland in 2007. The pain of separation is better understood when one reads his account of the lifelong, close-knit ties forged by Palestinian families.

"Whenever I compare my pain to [Christ's], I forget my pain," said Yousef, who lives on the West Coast. "When I feel alone in this journey, I know that He feels with me because He went through much worse. Every step I get closer to the cross I learn more about His sacrifice and pain, which absolutely makes me forget about my pain."

The oldest son of Sheikh Hassan Yousef, a respected imam and one of seven founders of Hamas, Yousef gained international attention in July 2008 after he shared his conversion story with a friend from Israel's Haaretz newspaper. That led to a report on Fox News that August and a January 2009 documentary that detailed his departure from the terrorist group.

While the former leader of the Islamic Youth Movement has kept a low profile since, he appeared Monday at the National Religious Broadcasters convention in Nashville, Tenn. Three

national TV appearances follow this week, starting today on CNN.

Yousef's conversion dismayed his father, who is still jailed and believes his son is bound for hell. The elder Yousef has denied his son's accounts of Hamas' activities, as did a Muslim cleric in a 2008 interview.

Yousef acknowledges many Palestinians will be upset by his book's most explosive revelation: that he spied for Shin Bet, Israel's intelligence service.

"Some of them will be offended; some will think I did this for personal reasons, but some of them will also wake up," Yousef told Charisma. "It's a hard truth. It's awakening to them. I did what I had to do because I had been witnessing a lot of blood, a lot of killing and I felt responsible."

His disillusionment with Hamas originated with experiencing an atmosphere of treachery and deception inside a prison the group controlled.

Leaders of the terror network routinely tortured Arabs suspected of collaborating with the enemy, he said. Over a three-year period in the 1990s, Yousef claims that Hamas investigated 150 suspected collaborators and killed 16.

When Shin Bet first asked him to spy Yousef intended to kill his handlers, but he changed his mind. He helped the agency with an eye toward preventing some of the violence wracking the nation. His action likely spared his father's life and prevented numerous suicide bombers from carrying out their plans.

Today he hopes that Christians who read his account will avoid siding with Jews or Muslims, instead looking at both through the eyes of Christ. Although not calling on Christians to drop their support for Israel, Yousef said they need to see Muslims as victims rather than criminals.

"I want them to understand there are many Palestinian Christians who live on the other side and Israel deals with them brutally," Yousef said. "I don't think the Israeli tank knows the difference between Palestinian Christians and Palestinian Muslims."

Instead of knee-jerk support for Israel, regardless of its government's actions, he would like to see Americans utilize their power and influence to force both sides to work together.

Christians can help by adjusting their attitudes towards Muslims and Palestinians. They will never believe in Jesus' love if those who profess to follow Christ look down on them, he said. He believes the only hope for people in the region is learning forgiveness and unconditional love so they can move past the 62-year-long conflict.

"We need at least to support ministries who work in the Middle East with Muslims," Yousef said. "There are a lot of ministries who put their lives in danger to evangelize to Muslims and evangelize to Jews. Support those efforts."