

BS'D

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## ***Trapped in a Hezbollah Mine Field***

During the Seven Days of Mourning after the passing of the former chief rabbi of Israel, **HaRav Mordechai Eliyahu**, in 2010, former IDF general and Knesset member Mr. **Effi Eitam** came to Jerusalem to fulfill the mitzvah of comforting mourners. While there in the rabbi's home, he told the grieved family the following story, in which he was personally involved.

In the mid and late 1990's, he was the commanding officer of a brigade within "*Utzvat HaGalil*" – the Israel Defense Forces division that is responsible for the ongoing security in the western sector of the border between Israel and Lebanon. One time, a squad of fifteen soldiers from his brigade entered Lebanon in the middle of the night on a secret mission. As they were crossing a certain low area between hills, the officer in charge suddenly signaled them urgently to halt. In a fear-filled whisper he informed them that they were within a life threatening mine field.

The mine fields in Lebanon were a clever plot by Iran's militant terrorist force, called *Hizbollah*, to kill and maim Israeli soldiers. They would surround an area with a large number of powerful bombs, which they painted and camouflaged to look like ordinary big stones. They would place these bombs among the natural stones of the area, and wait for IDF forces to enter the "mine field" and be encircled by the bombs.

What makes this type of mine field so especially dangerous is that it is not a matter of an individual touching or stepping upon a single bomb and the hair trigger fuse causes it to explode immediately. Rather, all the bombs were connected together. Not by wire or anything else physical; a hidden laser "arc" surrounded the entire area, and any attempt to cross the perimeter created by the unseen arc would detonate all the bombs simultaneously.

Also, on top of the hill nearest to the 'field' was situated a lookout station of Hizbollah soldiers. If any one of the terrorist watchers noticed Israeli soldiers having entered the area, he could activate the encircling laser arc. The densely packed powerful explosives were capable of killing large numbers of soldiers at once and injuring many more.

The officer leading the mission, who had identified the mine field, having been taught about them in a course, sadly told the squad there was no way to exit the mine field without being killed. Furthermore, he said, the Hizbollah soldiers positioned on the surrounding hills could open fire at any time.

With a trembling voice he called “*Pikud Hatzafon*” – the northern Israel IDF command center, located in Tsfat<sup>1</sup> -- and reported their dire situation. The brigade commander, Effi Eitam, was immediately informed. He grasped right away that the lives of 15 of his soldiers was hanging by a thread. But what could he do to help?

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At 3:00 AM the house phone started ringing in the home of the former “*Rishon L'Tzion*” (Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu). He was already awake and studying Torah. He picked up the receiver and on the line was Effi Eitam. As concisely as possible he described the deadly situation of his soldiers. He concluded with “Great Rabbi, we need the power of your honor’s prayers.”

“Wait a few minutes, but stay on the line,” was Rav Eliyahu’s reply, and he turned away to immerse himself totally in prayer.

After the few minutes he returned to the phone, and said in a gentle tranquil tone: **“I’m holding tight...take them out now!”**

Eitam, who understood only too well the lethal destructiveness of this type of bombs, of course realized the implications of giving the command to flee. On the other hand, he had complete pure faith in the power of true Torah sages, and he knew Rav Eliyahu well enough to know that he would never dare utter such a demand if he wasn’t fully confident that his prayer had been accepted.

He called back the squad leader. “Go! Leave! Right now! This instant! Start running!”

One of the Military Intelligence officers at the Northern Command Center was listening in on the terrorists’ communication network. He put his phone on speaker so that everyone nearby could hear the quarreling voices and the screams. The local Hizbollah commander was shouting over and over again that the terrorist on watch duty should activate the laser arc. The latter yelled back, “I’m doing it! I keep pressing the button but it is not working.” The commander roared at him that he was a traitor and ‘decorated’ him with numerous elaborate and eloquent Arabic curses.

Effi Eitam reported back to Rav Eliyahu that right after the last soldier had crossed the perimeter and sufficiently distanced himself, all the bombs began exploding one after the other around the four sides of the mine field. All the stones in the area were now specks and the trees had become sawdust. More importantly, all the Israeli soldiers made it back to their base, healthy and whole and unharmed.

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<sup>1</sup> And thus the prime target for rockets fired from Lebanon...and walking distance from my house!

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*Source:* Translated-adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the written account of Rabbi Yisrael Abergel in his weekly publication, “*Mesilot El Nefesh*” (#163), based on a report in the book, *Avihem Shel Yisrael l’Yeledim* by Rabbi Hanoch Rigel.

*Biographic notes:*

**HaRav Mordechai-Tzemach Eliyahu** [of blessed memory: 5689 - **25 Sivan** 5770 (1929-2010)], the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel from 1983 to 1993, was born in Iraq. A noted sage in all areas of Torah study, as well as a significant kabbalist, he was considered to be one of the leading authorities on Jewish law in Israel. His son, *Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu*, is currently the popular Chief Rabbi of **Tsfat**.

**Efraim "Effi" Eitam** was an Israeli brigadier general from 1993-1999 and a member of the Knesset between 2002 and 2009, where he also served as a government minister and cabinet member from 2002-2004.

*Connection:* This Shabbat is the 11<sup>th</sup> *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu.