



## **A former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Soldier's Journey to anti-Zionism & inner healing**

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**Zain Raza (ZR):** Thank you for tuning in today, and welcome back to another episode of The Source. I'm your host, Zain Raza. Today I'll be talking to Meital Yaniv, a former Israeli Defence Force soldier turned into an anti-Zionist activist. She's also a filmmaker and author, and her latest book is called Bloodlines. Meital, welcome to the show.

**Meital Yaniv (MY):** Thank you for having me.

**ZR:** In this interview, I would like to explore your journey from being an Israeli Defence Force soldier turned into an anti-Zionist activist. It is a journey which you documented in your book called Bloodlines. In the first part of your book, you talk about your family's history and how they survived the Holocaust, as well as their assimilation into an Israeli Zionist identity. Can you define for us first what you mean by Zionism, and then elaborate on the first part of your book in more detail?

**MY:** Yes. Thank you. So Zionism is a set of beliefs and of values that is predating the Holocaust, actually. And in that set of beliefs and values, the notion that a state should be established for Jewish people only, that the only way that Jewish people will be safe is if there's going to be a state that is going to be only for Jews. And in the creation of that indoctrination of Zionism, there's also a way in which the fathers of Zionism, especially Theodor Herzl and others, were also very in a way, not religious, maybe even against religion, against the Jewish religion in a way and they created this secular, atheist almost, identity. And the notion that came with Zionism is that the only way for Jews to be safe is to militarise. So two things: we need a state and we need to militarise. And through the creation of both of those needs the fear that without them we will be annihilated has been there from the very beginning. Which is, when Zionists started, moving to the land of Palestine and creating what we now know as Israel, the notion was everyone that's here, everyone that's already here, needs to leave. And we also cannot separate the trauma of the Holocaust with

also what else got implemented there, which is white supremacy. So, the way that I'm looking at the Zionists that came from Europe, most of them Ashkenazi Jew, there was also a lot of superiority and whiteness embedded in them. And when they came to the land of Palestine, whether if it was Arab Jews or Palestinians or Muslims or Christians, everyone who was not them immediately became an enemy and immediately became, if you were an Arab Jew, you can stay, but you're not going to make the decisions. We're not going to put you in a place of power. We're not going to put you in a place of creating decisions because we see ourselves as better than you.

And when you look at the history of Germany and at the way that when I was taught about the Nazi ideology is like you are creating an other, you're creating an enemy. And once you're creating that enemy, there's a threat that if that enemy exists, I am threatened. And, you know, for me, as an Israeli, the threat was like my grandmother's. If I don't protect my grandma from this enemy that we've created, right then they will die. And in creating that enemy, you have to dehumanise them. Because if Palestinians were not dehumanised in my upbringing, I wouldn't be able to fight them in a very, you know, we call these things wars and conflict. It's a one sided genocidal attack. There's no side here. And when I look at the history of Germany, we can really see those power struggles starting there, of like one race, deciding that the other one is a threat and therefore needs to be eliminated. Is that answering all of the parts of your question?

**ZR:** Talk more about your family history.

**MY:** Yeah. So my family, I have a sephardic side that is from Greece and from Palestine, from Jerusalem. And my grandma from Greece moved to Palestine in the 30s. And both of my grandparents, from my maternal side, were recruiters for the Lehi, which is a known Jewish terrorist organisation that was fighting both the Palestinian Arabs and the British of the land. And then from my paternal side, my family is from Poland, from Krakow. And they basically, my great grandma, who the first cycle of the book is written from her voice, had a dream about the Holocaust a week before and woke up and packed a few things and took both of her kids and moved as close as she could to the Russian border. My great grandfather joined them a few weeks after. He had to ride bicycles because the trains were bombed already. And they survived the war because they were in a Russian working camp, so not in a German death camp. And after the survivor of that horrendous situation of the Russian camp, they were slowly making their way into, you know, kinds of freedom – which never felt free, but different kinds, working in courthouses for extremely racist masters and, suffering in many different ways until they were allowed to go back to Poland. And when they went back to Poland, they did not feel like they were wanted. But the four of them, so my great grandma, my great grandfather and my grandma and my great uncle survived. And then my grandfather is the only survivor of his family. Everyone else was murdered in Treblinka. And he survived because he was also in Russia, studying. And my grandparents met in Poland after the war. Had my father, very quickly after. And I can really trace the way that trauma of what happened to them had no room to heal because the need to escape never left them. And

then they were given the offer of Zionism, which my grandfather was already [inaudible] kind of involved with.

And this notion of like, here's this state, come live here and the only thing we need to do is make soldiers and then we'll be fine here. And there was never a notion of like, who else lives there? What does it mean to kick them out? What does it mean to murder them? What does it mean to massacre them? In order for us to have this moment of safety. And their trauma really became one of the many traumas that have created the land of Israel as we know it today. There's also many other traumas that happen in relation to the Nazis as well in different Arab countries in the Middle East, where basically Jews were expelled for different reasons. So this moment of Nakba, the catastrophe, which is the creation of the state of Israel and the massacre of hundreds of thousands of people and the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, really it is like a way where I can really trace how this unattended trauma of the Holocaust and other traumas that were in relation to Nazi ideology and Holocaust have created this need for an army. And what we're seeing today is that need on steroids. So the victimhood, the fear, and the way in which we think we can, you know, even that notion of calling it the Israeli Defence Forces, right? It's like that, that statement that we constantly are hearing, Israel has a right to defend itself – like everyone has a right to defend itself, but for what cost? Right? But the notion that we think that we are allowed to defend ourselves by any means necessary, I trace that to that survivor mentality and the way that that never got attended.

And don't get me wrong, I don't really blame anyone in the cycle. I don't blame Nazi Germany for creating this trauma, and I don't blame my ancestors for not tending to that trauma. But I think it's time to do that now. Blaming people, I don't think that's the way forward. But I do want to invite my ancestors, people who have lineages like mine that have survived the Holocaust and lineages in Germany that are the descendants of those lineages to really do the tending and the work to heal that, because that is the only way we move forward. What we're seeing today in Germany, the overcompensating of support of Israel, is moving from blame and shame and guilt and unchecked whiteness. Like that's what we're seeing right now. If we actually take the time to heal those wounds, to really come to terms and forgive the Nazi grandparents that people in Germany have, if we really take that time to make those amends and we take time, as, what we say Israelis today, to make those amends, then there's like a way in which this doesn't continue to cycle on, which is what we're seeing right now. So to finish your question, my grandparents and my great grandparents moved to the state of Israel in 1949 or 1950 and as soon as they arrived, they were Ashkenazi Jews, so they received privileges that Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews were not receiving. And they slowly were able to find jobs and get housing. Nothing in the way that we're used to, but they were giving all these resources. And they had another son, on the land and that son, my uncle, died as a soldier in the Yom Kippur War. And that is really, I think, a moment when I look back on like, this is the cost of this identity you placed on yourself, and this is the cost of turning away from Judaism.

Because that's another thing. Like I was raised very Israeli and very not within the Jewish religion. And I returned to my Sephardic and Ashkenazi lines as a healing practice, because when you look at Judaism and when you look at Zionism, those two systems of values do not match. The most holy value in Judaism, in whatever lineage you're looking in is saving lives. And we say that saving one life is as if you've saved the whole world. So we see a single life as a whole world. And right now, what we're seeing in Gaza, every number that is being added to this list of extreme genocide, where we're above 30,000 worlds that have been destroyed. So in Judaism, you learn to see each one of those beings as a whole world. And the fact that we are committing this as Jews or this is being committed for Jews, I think that statement of "not in our name", that we see Jews all over the world saying, because this is not actually Judaism, this is Zionism. And with Zionism on the land of Palestine, there will never be a free Palestine. So that's why also the book is very much dedicated to bringing the Israeli identity and state to a loving and caring death.

**ZR:** Let us move to the second part of your book, which deals with what you call, quote, "indoctrination and brainwashing", unquote, in the Israeli army. Talk about the environment that you grew up in. What led you to join the Air Force and the cultural experience there?

**MY:** Yeah. So, it's mandatory to join the army in Israel when you're 18. And that indoctrination, you know, when I look back at that, I really believe it starts in the womb. And it starts with those untended traumas also that live in the womb and in the DNA. And this notion that, you know, I really feel that when I left my mother's body, the army uniform got stitched on my body immediately. Because to raise soldiers, what we're seeing right now is not training that starts when you're 18 to be able to do what you're doing right now. That is training that starts in the womb; to be able to look at an entire people as not human, that is not training that you can do in a year or in two years in three years. That is like generational training. So I really see how, you know, I have also a pretty unique family in their involvement. I have extremely Zionist, right wing – my dad is an Air Force commander. My great uncle is a very famous Mossad agent. I have a fallen soldier in my lineage, my grandparents Lehi recuder. So it's also like a very specific kind of militarisation that they took on. But even without that, it's an entire society. So it's in the breast milk. It's in what you learn in school, in kindergarten. It's how we play as children. We play in the army boots of our uncles and fathers. There are tanks, like literally tanks from different types of moments in the history of Israel that are left for the children to play in. And I don't know an Israeli child who didn't find themselves playing inside a real army tank. And that's play. So when you have that way of really indoctrinating, what should become of you, which is this heroic soldier and then you also offer the trauma.

So I was raised with seeing images from the Holocaust from such a young age and such extreme photos and it was really – you know, it's like unconscious – but it's really manipulative to be like, if you don't become this soldier, this is what's going to happen to the people you love. And this is the only way to stay alive. So when you traumatise a child with images and then also are being raised by elders that have not taken care of their trauma and their trauma is oozing from their bodies in different ways and the only way you tell that child

that you can survive this is if you become this soldier, then everything else just like fits into that indoctrination. And it's through love, that's really where it gets tricky, because it's really through love and family love that it really gets embedded in you. When you return from the army in your uniform and your grandparents hug you. You have never received that kind of hug from them before. And that's real. Especially a child, you know, needs a nervous system.

So I was raised that way, and I was 18 and it was time for me to join the army and because my dad was in the Air Force, I was recruited to the Air Force as well. It's called second generation. It's supposed to be a perk. And after six months, I had like a course, I had different types of training, and yeah, I was stationed in a base, and after six months, my base from Tel Aviv moved to the south part of Israel, and I was told to, you know, send planes to fuel planes, which was something that was a part of my routine job, to send planes and fuel plane planes, and those planes that I fuelled in the air with other planes, or sent to fuel, went into Gaza. And, I'm assuming they bombed Gaza. And after that mission, I puked all the way back, I remember that very viscerally. And then the next day I was supposed to go to the base and I had my first panic attack, and it was in the car my dad was driving me in, and I just really lost control. So like, kicking and screaming and breaking things in the car and then breaking myself and couldn't enter the base. Which means that I also didn't show up to my shift, which is punishable. And the next day I had to come stand trial. And I was grounded to the base. I was offered either to be on kitchen duty or to guard the base. And I knew that if – so the job that I did, I didn't need to have weapons on me, I just had, like, my uniform. In basic training, I had to shoot, like, you know, shooting range ones. And that left a trauma that I'm still trying to undo. But when I was offered to guard the base, that would have meant that I would have to carry a rifle for those three weeks. And everyone really wanted me to choose that because it felt like I would save face a little bit if I choose that job and not the kitchen duty job. And I decided to choose the kitchen duty. I didn't really understand why. It just felt like something that I needed to do. And then in those three weeks, I really understood that I needed to leave the army. Like that there's no way that I'm staying here. My body saying no. And because of how I was raised, knowing that, made me want to take my life. So I knew that if there's going to be a rifle on me, I will shoot myself. Which is why I chose kitchen duty. And there was something about, you know, when you're being loved into your role in life, which to me was to be a soldier that will protect my grandparents and then that moment breaks apart when you're still very young, I was 18, that is sometimes something you can't come back from. Because what else is left? I didn't know anything else. So I say thank you every day to the spirits and the beings that hold me and the miracle that made me move through that and stay alive and find a whole new way of life.

So I think, you know, one thing that I didn't mention in the beginning, that that identity, that soldier identity, that Israeli identity again, because it's through love, really gives you a sense of belonging. That, again, as a child, you really need, as a human being, you really need. And it's false belonging, because that sense of belonging has everything to do with the destruction of life. That is not our own but by destroying Palestinian life, we are killing ourselves. Because we are unable to love in a real way. We're unable to feel belonging in a real way. We are stuck in a fear and victimhood cycle that we can't shake off. So to find true belonging, to

find true love, is something that that breakage from the army allowed me to be in. And that is also the reason why I'm able to sit with you today and speak about all of this. And it's coming from a place of like, I am liberating myself so that I can stand for the liberation of other people. In my case, I'm standing fully for the liberation of the Palestinian people. And none of us are free until all of us are free. That is very true. And I want my people what we would call an Israeli people, to feel that liberation in themselves, to know that they can feel love, that they can be in touch with their hearts, that true belonging is not in the army, that true safety is not in army and statehood, that none of those things are keeping us safe...

**ZR:** No, please continue. I would also like to find out what led you to your journey to become somebody who stands up against Zionism. Usually I would assume that somebody such as yourself, would have gotten very negative feedback from family, friends and society. And, also the guilt trip might have led you into depression or falling into a black hole. How did you end up there? I mean, I could also imagine people watching it in Germany and elsewhere that are following the mainstream perspective that there might be a notion where they call you a self-hating Jew. So how would you describe your journey towards anti-Zionism?

**MY:** Yeah. It's interesting. You know, I had a conversation with Doctor Gabor Maté and this same question came about a self-hating Jew. And I am actually, like I say it, a self-loving Jew for the first time in my life. Because I stand as an anti-Zionist. So, it's interesting that those things get so conflated with each other, because as I said earlier, also like coming back to Judaism as a healing practice is eliminating Zionism from my being because they do not match. They cannot coexist actually, in the true values of Judaism. I am very moved by the opportunity to speak with a German audience. And I'm moved because what I'm seeing right now is – and I'm not saying this with judgement, actually, I'm saying it with a lot of love and as a fellow white person as well – but what I'm seeing right now is guilt and shame on steroids from Germany. And instead of taking care of what was done to you that created the monstrosity that we know as Nazi Germany, instead of taking care of that, you are recreating that in us by supporting what we're doing right now. So this cycle can continue, right?! But we as people who are born into this lineages must end this cycle.

And a way to end this cycle is to really face our biggest fears and the things that really we're indoctrinated into, if I don't have that, I will be killed. Let's look at that. I don't know exactly. I'm not German. I don't live in Germany. I'm not German. I don't know what those things are. I don't know what are those deepest fears that have created Nazi Germany. But I know it has to do something with the need for belonging, for love and for safety. None of those things will ever be established to any people around the world, with militarisation and statehood and borders, none of it. That empire is failing. So in this moment, I really want to invite – in the same way that I had to really sit with my own, as you said, depression, undo all of that and really find new ways to be in touch with my heart and love. I love today in ways that I didn't even know that are possible. I feel belonging today to the earth as like, you know, I am a part of everything that is around me. This air, the sun, the earth, the water, the birds. I'm able to hear bird songs. When I was in the army, the birds were the names that they gave the planes.

So there's like a new way to reconnect to the cycles that are here. That that is true belonging. So I feel really cold in the same way that, you know, our biggest fear as a people is that we would be pushed into the sea. That is like the biggest fear that as Israelis we hold.

In a conversation I had yesterday with Dr. Báyò Akómoláfé, I had that insight to say, what if we actually stand on the sea and give ourselves to the sea? What if we actually jump in? Like that's the biggest fear. So what if we do it and see what happens next? But in order for us to do it, in order for us to achieve that level of healing – and I'm calling it healing, I want my people healed. What we're seeing right now is illness. I want them healed. So for us to do that, the world needs to seize us. The ceasefire is also for us to just seize it so that we can heal. And I don't know what that looks like and I won't know until we get there, but I need Germany to help me get there. You can't fund us to keep doing this because you feel guilty and shamed. You did create this in some way, yeah, that is a part. But there's no separation here, right? So we live in a world without borders, I forgive you, my ancestors forgive you. We are doing this work to forgive you. We're okay. But now, please help us. There's a duty here. We joined ourselves through that trauma and we need to heal it together. So find a way to forgive yourselves. I will work for the rest of my life to forgive myself for sending those planes into Gaza. That is my job. And then at the same time, I'm working to forgive the Nazi officers that wanted to kill my – if they killed my family, I wouldn't even be here today, right? There's different levels of forgiveness and loving the people that the world tells us to hate is the biggest medicine. Because again, none of us are free until all of us are free. So I really want to invite, in the same way that I am wanting my people to jump into the sea, I want the German lineages to understand what that sea is for them. What is your biggest fear? And here are my hands, I'm holding it with you. Let's jump in there. Let's stop this madness. Let's stop this cycle of violence.

**ZR:** Let us talk about the third and final part of your book, which focuses on the current situation. Let me just recap the situation for our viewers that have not been following the news at the moment. So Israel's assault has killed around 27,800 Palestinians so far and severely wounded around 67,000. According to recent reports, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered the military to expand its operation in the southern Gaza town of Rafah, where at least a million people who fled the north have sought refuge. The White House announced as well that it would not support any major operations in Rafah without due consideration for the refugees there. There also seems to be no ceasefire in sight, as Benjamin Netanyahu rejected Hamas's proposal, stating it is delusional, while Hamas responded by saying that they believe Netanyahu intends to pursue conflict in the region. Can you talk about the third chapter of your book, as well as the current situation? Do you think there is peace in sight? Because even though I was totally supportive of what you're saying, I don't think the people who are in power and calling the shots will even take the first step to even reflect on themselves and find that inner healing that is so much needed. What can be done outside of that to stop this cycle of violence and the current situation which is spiralling out of control?

**MY:** I don't have any hope that Israel will stop by itself. We're not close to that. We're not going to get there. So the world needs to make us stop. How does the world do that? The only way that I know within the system that we have is people power; supporting the BDS movement, creating more and more sanctions on Israel. And that is really where we need Germany. We need Germany to shake off whatever this is, again shame and guilt that is being moved there and find a way to make your government make this stop. I am living in the United States and we're trying to do the same here. But once the funding will stop, Israel cannot afford – Israel cannot afford the genocide. Israel cannot afford the occupation. So the first thing that needs to happen is for that funding to stop. And also this momentum. Also not funding UNWRA anymore, is also a moment that is really showing what is actually at play here. And all those funds that are going to the Israeli bombs right now should go to Palestinians well-being, whether it's in the land of Palestine or all over the world, and for the right of return to happen.

So I really want to invite everyone to find a way to care about this. And I don't know what that means for every single person, but find, as you said, the end of the book, I wrote the majority of Bloodlines in 2021 and it was about to get published now in this latest cycle of genocide. I had the opportunity to write this moment into the end, and I'm basically speaking about this moment in November before it went to print. and the majority of the book is a list of names of Palestinians who have been murdered by the Israeli army, and settlers in the West Bank from October 7th. And at the time that we sent it to print, there were about 6000 names, but we also knew that there were closer to 10,000 people who have been murdered already. So there's names and then just I placed a sign for each name, each word that I don't know the name of yet. And that count is continuing on the Bloodlines book website and I do that as a practice of care. Again, each one of those names known or unknown to me, each one of those numbers, is a whole world. And I want to learn that entire world. So if you are not yet finding a way to care about this, I want to invite you to find one story, one child's image. This genocide is live on Instagram. Find one thing you can care about and walk with it for a day, for a week, find a way to care and then from that caring, let your heart get broken. Because this is the time we are in a heartbreak moment, let your heart get broken and then let it get broken more and then find the action that is right for you. And that action might be a hunger strike. That action might be a protest. That action might be writing a poem. That action might be closing a university. Whatever it is, find the thing. May it be something we have not seen yet. And find a way to break open more. That is something that I am doing daily, finding ways to break open more so that I have the capacity to hold this and find my movement from that place, and find my voice from that place.

**ZR:** To my last question. There's this perception in Germany, which is imported from the Israeli state, that this is a religious war that if Israel does not defend itself, all the Arab nations will basically devour it. Also, there's this perception that all Jews are united behind Israel. Can you talk about if there are other dissenters, networks, that have left the army and also talk about organisations that have Jews within them that are also in line with what you stated in this interview?



**MY:** I don't know what the level of propaganda is in Germany and what the news is telling you. I know that in Israel the news is lying to the people every day. So I also just want to invite people to find other ways to receive information. Don't depend on your state. I mean, it's probably lying to you. So find other ways to find that information, and that's really your responsibility. If you're not in a land that is being under attack and genocide right now, your job is to find ways to understand what's happening there for you. And then, that consensus that all Jews need Israel is the biggest lie of it all. Because as we've seen all over the world organisations like Jewish Voice for Peace, if not now, are shutting things down day after day, city after city. We have been all over the United States in different places in Europe, constantly saying, "not in our name", constantly saying, "the occupation, the genocide must end", constantly saying, "don't give Israel money", constantly trying to disturb business as usual to make our representative understand that the state of Israel is not keeping us safe, is not making us feel belonging. Actually the state of Israel is making Jews all over the world not safe. Period. End of sentence. And we're trying to say this over and over again.

I can say as an Israeli that, Zionist Jews in the United States and all over the world that are dependent on the state of Israel are actually killing us. And I want you to sit with that, if that is you. If you are an Zionist Jew living outside of Israel, that depends on the state of Israel, you are killing the people you think that are keeping you safe. So I also want to invite you to just like, find that; like, what's that about? And then there is an organisation that I'm a part of as well, called Shores, which is in the United States, and it's for anti-Zionist Israelis. So the whole organisation is made out of Israelis. We speak Hebrew. And we're anti-Zionist. We don't believe that the state of Israel should exist. And not to mention that there's also organisations within Israel that are fighting what's happening right now. And then, you know, I also want to ask the question: I see ourselves as Israelis, as the oppressors right now, right? So why is it that we need to hear from the oppressor to believe the oppressed? Right? I can sit here and name Jewish historians and Israeli historians and ex-IDF soldiers and organisers that are Jewish and Israeli, that will tell you what I just said. And you might believe them more, but I want to invite everyone to listen to Palestinian voices, because they have been under occupation for over 75 years. They have been living with apartheid for over 75 years. So why is it that hearing from me as an ex-Israeli soldier is more important than hearing to someone that has been oppressed so severely, that is trying to maintain a life in Gaza that has been under severe militarisation, lockdown of the air, of the sea, of the earth, under the Earth for 19 years now. Why is hearing from me about that feels more important? So I also really want to take this opportunity to, yes, find the movements that you want to support and also, let's listen to the people on the land that are under that attack. [00:40:54][151.9]

**ZR:** Meital Yaniv, filmmaker, author and activist. Thank you so much for your time today.

**MY:** Thank you.

**ZR:** And thank you for tuning in today. Please do not forget to follow our alternative channels on Rumble, Telegram and our podcast called Podbean. YouTube, which is owned by Google, can shadowban and censor us at any time. So we are asking all our viewers to join today, because if that day comes, we won't be able to reach you with this message. So please

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**END**

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