Israeli attacked by Ramallah crowd recalls ‘miracle’ escape, may still face charges

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A day after he and a friend were attacked and their car set ablaze by a crowd of Palestinians after they accidentally entered downtown Ramallah, one of the Israelis involved in the incident described on Thursday the “miracle” escape, saying he was sure he would be killed.

After apparently following bad directions, the two found themselves near al-Manara Square in the de facto Palestinian Authority administrative capital, where they were assaulted by a large crowd of people who eventually set their car ablaze. The pair escaped unharmed and were handed over to Israeli authorities by PA forces, who extracted them from the harrowing ordeal.

Police are still investigating the incident and how the two managed to wander into Ramallah despite large red signs warning Israeli drivers that it is illegal for them to enter Palestinian-controlled areas. Officials are mulling possible charges against the two, Channel 12 news reported.

Michael Sharabi, who spoke to reporters Thursday afternoon, said he and the person he was with were immediately surrounded by a group of youths after entering Manara Square. The mob quickly started attacking their car with cinder blocks, he said.

In videos from the scene, a crowd of Palestinians can be seen surrounding their car, with the Israelis not responding to taunts from the crowd.

After the car windows were smashed, they decided to leave the car and try to make a run for it, Sharabi said.

“We managed to open the door on one side, we trembled with fear and I started saying Shema Yisrael,” he said, explaining that he would be killed.

“I started running in the middle of the street which was full in all directions of people glaring at us. Another miracle that happened to us is that we did not lose each other in the middle of the angry crowd,” he added.

According to Sharabi, the crowd physically attacked the pair, hitting them, throwing objects at them as they fled, and setting their car ablaze.

“They threw cement blocks and everything and thank God we came out without a single scratch, it was a miracle,” he said.

He later told Channel 12 news that the pair was chased for 10 minutes before PA forces stepped in to help them.

Under Ramallah’s policy of security coordination, PA forces work to prevent Palestinian terror attacks against Israelis and extricate Israelis who stumble into Palestinian areas of the West Bank.

“The citizens left accompanied by Palestinian security forces in coordination with the [Israeli] security forces in the area,” the Israeli army said.

The two Israelis were subsequently held for interrogation by Israeli police and may still face charges.

Israelis are technically banned by an Israeli military order from entering Palestinian Authority areas. Arab Israelis, however, regularly patronize major Palestinian cities. Jewish Israelis also enter Palestinian cities — normally without a hitch — but in much lower numbers.

Sharabi is a resident of the West Bank settlement of Shiloh; police said the other Israeli lives in the mostly Ultra-Orthodox Israeli city of Elad. Both are members of the Bratslav Hasidic sect.

Sharabi claimed they had sought to reach Hashmonaim, a settlement about a half-hour drive west of Ramallah. He blamed an Arab man for giving them bad directions when they stopped at a gas station near Eli, a settlement northeast of Ramallah.

“He directed us to continue straight and to go past all the traffic circles. Somewhere along the way I realized we were not going in the right direction, and then what happened happened — cinderblocks and stones,” he allegedly told police, according to quotes carried by Hebrew media outlets Wednesday night.