

## THE POWER OF SECURITY: REVOLUTIONARY COMBAT SYSTEM BORN IN ISRAEL



Translation of the report by journalist Daniel Shahak, published  
in sport5

(<http://www.sport5.co.il/articles.aspx?FolderID=413&docID=197435&lang=he>) on 28-09-2015

The attack that sparked a little red light alert in the Israel Security Agency (Shin-Bet / ISA) and the violent reality, transformed the Operational Krav-Maga from a bundle of ideas into a methodology that has gained great momentum around the world. A story about a wakening, dreams and a guide for life.

Different methods of karate, MMA, Capoeira, Muai Tai, Judo and Self-defense courses. Martial Arts from Tokyo to New York. Mysterious secrets and radical tendencies. In a multitude of theories, promises and aspirations, a person exudes the way he developed a revolution in this field. A change of mind, not of action. An innovative mind that has learned the lesson from the Israeli experience.

"As a young instructor at the Israel Security Agency I realized that the traditional and military Krav-Maga that we had been implementing, was

not suitable for the needs of the operating units in the agency," recalls Gabi (Gabriel) Shai.

"The murder of one of our intelligence officer, was the trigger that led us to understand that what we are doing is not so suitable". Because of his operational role, he was not trained for combat, but had traditional self-defense tools required to deal with basic situations. During a meeting, the source went to make coffee but instead, he returned with pepper in his hand, he threw it into the eyes of the officer and killed him with a knife. At this point, we began to understand that something has to change and we started to train in ways that are closer to our reality. We understood that it is necessary to develop a specific training program for each unit and each operational function, adapting it specifically to the environment and to the specific risks. "

Operational Krav-Maga, a methodology developed by Shai, was spread in recent years in several countries, sprouted from that wake up call. "After I had retired from the service, I decided to sit down and start writing. I began to make changes in the unwritten theory, because we had not conducted a formal process to define it to begin with. At the beginning we had the chicken and then with my retirement, I started thinking of how to lay fresh eggs ".

Gabriel Shai (Schain) was born in Argentina and was attracted to sports since childhood. In the club of the Jewish community he trained in Judo, Boxing and Self Defense. At an early age he decided to make a radical change in his life. "I came to Israel in 1972, I came as a volunteer but knowing that it is for good". He tells in retrospect.

"My brother came in 1969 and stayed, and I knew that as soon as I finish high school I will go and stay as well. I came to Kibbutz Beit Zera and towards the end of my volunteering I decided to study physical education. I registered in Wingate, took the exams and was accepted. In the afternoon there was Krav-Maga training for students living at the Academy boarding. I trained during the three years of study and then the School of Sports Trainers hired me as director of a "general sports instructor course" for youth from marginalized areas. Marginal youth, were called in those days, young people that were involved in violence, drugs and all kinds of issues. The idea was to guide them so they can return to their neighborhoods with a profession and serve as a positive example. One of the topics was the Krav-Maga "(Clarification of Gabi. Not all participants were related to drugs and violence, most of they

were overwhelmingly excellent young people living in these "marginal" neighborhoods).

Young Gabi Shai began working as assistant to Imi Lichtenfeld traditional Krav-Maga system Developer and mythological image in all aspects of Israeli combat system. (Clarification of Gabi: I did not worked with IMI but I had the honor of being his assistant in the academic years 1976 and 77, during training dictated by Imi in this specific course). Then he joined the engineering unit of the Armed Forces of Israel operating later as an operational skills instructor, working as Krav-Maga instructor and being Eli Avikzar assistant, commander of the IDF Krav-Maga Department. After his release from his military service and after several months of rigorous security check, he was recruited to the General Security Service (ISA), as a Physical Training and Krav-Maga instructor. "After three years I became the head of the Krav-Maga department in the Shin Bet, until in 1988 I traveled abroad on a diplomatic mission," reveals Shai. "I went through various trainings and participated in operational activities at the agency, which gave me experience in the protection of delegations, personalities, transport, navigation, aviation, information, etc. I was head of security at the Embassy of Israel in Chile and then worked in the training department of the National Security and combat School".

In 1996, he retired early and helped develop the training center in Caesarea; A shooting training camp that under his professional management was turned into a multipurpose center for all kinds of courses and training for private and government security sectors. But inside him burned a vision that something was not being done correctly.

"I opened my company ISIT and started writing the theory and philosophy of OKM (Operational Krav-Maga), which until then was not a written theory," he tells returning to his time in the security forces.

"There was great interest in the progress. As head of the department of Krav-Maga, I brought my teacher from Wingate, Dr. Alberto Ayalon. He did not specialize in issues related to combat, but was wise enough to ask all the right questions. He fathered the idea that training should be integral. The traditional methodology is based on taking for example, a police officer, and defining all the professional issues that his role requires. Physical fitness, self defense, suspects detection, shooting, procedures, etc ... After he had learned all professional topics his knowledge is integrated by different types of tactical exercising. But when a person operates, it does so as an integral unit and does not

begin to integrate the components on site, which include many elements that influence his reaction. The first step was the integration of Krav-Maga training with firearms".

The first sign of success came even before the theory was formalized. "In 1985, we had two terrorist attacks on the Israeli airline El Al, in Rome and Vienna, on the same day and at the same time. For the first time, one of the security officers, our student, was out of ammunition just a short distance from one of the terrorists. Unlike what we were taught in the past - 'once you run out of ammo you should narrow your silhouette and replace the empty magazine', we started the integration of Krav-Maga drills in similar situations. Something we were not authorized to do, up until two years before the incident. What the security officer did, was to use Krav-Maga in order to neutralize the terrorist and then proceed to change the empty magazine. That showed that the changes we had begun to teach and practice, were correct. We began to integrate elements of decision-making and early identification, especially in Krav-Maga training, to avoid focusing only on the technical field. That was the beginning, but at that time I still did not know that I was driving forward a new concept and, that in later years, I will begin a process of identifying the scientific basis for it. It was an idea of adapting the training to the environment and character of the operational function, and the start of the integration of the most varied relevant elements, as far as possible. Not all changes were easy to perform. "

What is the difference with the traditional Krav-Maga?

"After I retired from the service I started a process of adapting the methodology to the requirements of the civil market because at the beginning, the OKM was used only as a tool for operating units from the police, security, defense, etc. But the main market is the civil one and my view is that in many countries civilians operate in environments that force them to implement the basic principles of prevention, the same principles of knowing and understanding of the environment and a continuous reception and analysis of the information to make decisions where and when to go, and where they should not go. There are countries where, even, taking a child to kindergarten, or returning home from studies, is a full operational activity. When an escort is required, and in which way there is adequate street lighting. There are colleagues who have been instructors of Krav-Maga in the armed forces and added some techniques from other systems. Sometimes we can find

out that further from the name itself, the relationship with the Krav-Maga is casual. Operational Krav-Maga is based on the on Traditional Krav-Maga skills. In OKM there is no invention of new techniques and we do not import techniques from other systems, unlike others that try to reinvent the wheel. In OKM we did not invented the wheel, but we try to fix it by means of the methodology and development of the most diverse abilities."

"There are systems which place the technical skills in the center - how to stand, how to hit or how to disarm a person, and around it, they present additional ideas. On my system, the technique is a means and not an aim by itself ", emphasizes Shai. "The stated objective depends on the market to which we direct the training - developing operational skills for the professional security sector or development of life skills in civilian training. When we analyze professional confrontations of several security bodies, it is clear that in many cases the technical level was not the main element that led to the failure. In many cases it's due to a lack of operational awareness, and in others a misunderstanding of the situation, incorrect tactical positioning and a lot of examples of mismanagement of incidents. It often happens that in a discussion, a police officer decides for an improper application of the physical force, or others, in which police gun remains in the hands of the assailant. When it comes to a civilian, the subject of consciousness is first and foremost. It does not help to know how to make a defense against a knife attack, if preventive awareness on where to go and where not enter it lacks. Same, if the individual does not know, how to detect abnormal behavior in his area. In the moment he will face an incident that could escalate to a level of violence and not having the proper tools for treating such incident, it is likely that his decisions in stressful situations will be incorrect. This is true for all people, which can lead to an inadequate reaction to such incidents. If he had possessed the mental ability of how to manage the incident and prevent the escalation of the situation, the incident would have ended differently. "

"Training of Operational Krav-Maga is an experimental learning process and is done on the basis of trial and error, along with confrontation with situations that nobody can foresee. "In all traditional systems of combat and self defense the instructor say: 'good morning, what we're going to learn today is defense against knife attacks, pay attention.' The instructor demonstrates the proper technique, breaks it down into sub-components and students begin to practice step-by-step, "analyzes Shai.



"I, however present the problem and not the solution. I place them in pairs or groups and ask A' to attack B' with a knife. Gradually we see that what prevails in reality is the basic instinct, on which; I developed the principles of action and reaction of the system. The aim of my instructors is to guide the students in the right way, so they find the best solution for each specific situation. Krav-Maga has a very healthy rational, so we get the same answer 99% of the time. The answers, however, will arrive in different and more complex ways and will be more exciting and helpfullat at the same time. These ways help develop skills additional to the physical ones, required for self-defense and combat. Rather than offering them fishes, I teach them how to fish. I insist by myself and the other instructors not to be called Masters or using other bombastic titles, we are mere 'madrijim'. Its literal translation in almost every language is 'guidance'. We guide our trainees on the right path in which he must follow to reach the optimal solution."

"I do not teach exercises. In traditional systems, there is an exercise for every situation. I learned from my experience that people have difficulties to remember a lot of exercises for a lot of situations. Motor learning implies that, in order to make a move with precision, the person must practice many hours, during a lot of time, and in the same way. This is not always possible. For this level are required years of training, but not always we have a lifetime to get it", he explains with professionalism. "We teach principles of action and reaction. All exercise is today taught in other systems, it is specific to a particular situation, fact that requires the development and teaching of new exercises. A person who threatens with a gun can do with the right hand or the left, with one or two hands, remote or close to the body, right or left, front, back, or while sitting on a bus, etc.. You cannot know in advance exactly what the assailant will do. In the situation in which the student is trained in order to learn a lot of exercises, the 'transfer' of knowledge to be applied against a new situation is more difficult, than for the one who learns our principles". And it works in reality. "I just returned from Peru. A trainee of one of my instructors, a completely normative student of 25 years old, returned from a party with two friends, by taxi, "describes Shai. "The two comrades descended before and after several meters, the taxi stops. In South America there are places where the driver cooperates with criminals. In this case it was taxi driver who turned in his seat and shouted 'give me everything you

have. "He immediately pointed with a gun. The passenger was totally surprised. I brought him the instructor course, to explain what happened, and he said: 'first I behaved like a child, as my instructor taught me - do not try to be Superman. I gave him the money, then he shouted 'give me more' and with the barrel of the gun, he hit me on the forehead. I realized that the driver was not going to reassure. At that moment I decided to apply the principles you have taught me, even though I had never practiced that particular situation'. "The victim managed to escape from the place after disarming the aggressor without any problem ".

Everything is based on exercising as close to reality as possible, and often in surprising situations. "High skill level is not required to do it instinctively," mentions Shai. "The problem is that today people are not concentrated in the surroundings, but on their phones. Crossing the road while writing SMS, as well as while driving. When we make a break in training, and someone goes with a glass of water in hand, someone else will scream and attack him suppressively. At first, the "victim" will look for where to place the glass. So, they practice in least expected surprise situations – when someone is going to get dressed, or going out of the services or even will be aggressed by someone while training with someone else. It never will be 100% reality, but, as close as possible. If I train a regular citizen, a school teacher, or a businessman, and help in the development of his ability to early detection of an unusual phenomenon, decisions-making in stressful situations or the performance of mental skills - which almost nobody does - along with physical skills implementation, it contributes to their everyday life. Meanwhile they learn how to defend themselves, to attack or exit from difficult situations, one way or another. "

What began as a set of improving ideas, became an organized combat system.

Gabi Shai met an old friend from the army who manages the Krav-Maga and Martial Arts training school of the Physical Education College located at Wingate Institute. "I told him about my project and he invited me to attend a martial arts trainers course. There, they teach training methodology, and sports science. My work for graduation was to submit a Krav-Maga detailed training program adapted to my methodology. This was the official accreditation process. The program has been approved. Besides it, together we are trying to correct the disrepute

name that Krav-Maga have, due to a miss-control of the system in many countries".

The above negative reputation stems from the fact that Krav-Maga does not have any supervision and it became a outbreak field after the death of Lichtenfeld. Some disciples with a professional and business vision, successfully spread the system abroad, but they lost control, and now anyone can open its own Krav-Maga training institute with no special difficulties. In Israel, the instructor must have a certificate qualified by and academic institution and at Zinman College, the largest authorized body in Israel, are trying to make some order abroad too. "I received the mission to become Zinman representative to promote their activities in Latin America," says Shai, who did not left the sources. "Today I have that hat, and beyond that my method, but the courses are open to anyone who wants to return to Traditional Krav-Maga roots and to anyone who wants to be listed in the database of the Zinman College. In the near future, instructors certificates of those who has successfully attended such course, will be visualized in the academy web-site. Even though Krav-Maga is not a controlled topic which requires "export licence", I work with all the approvals of the Israeli Ministry of Defence. I'm also serving as a consultant and lecturer at the International Leadership Institute where I'm part of the team who manages civilian security projects, alongside working with Special Forces. "

**So who is practicing Operational Krav-Maga?** "In many places people still teaching as taught 40 years ago, it is difficult to make changes. Abroad, I have instructors who's training process takes 8 to 10 months. The approach is that future instructors are already Krav Maga instructors or practitioners possessors of a good skill level. Sometimes local representatives helps teaching, future OKM instructors basic skills, before starting our specific training. "

**If they come with the Krav-Maga background, why do training lasts so long?** 'Cause I'm not leading OKM as a business, but a personal desire to share my professional knowledge and experience with others. The second thing is the content. Since I set up that physical skill/technics are not the mail goal, then life skills you do not learn overnight. "

OKM instructors' course that has been spread to several countries in Europe and Latin America consists of five stages of innovative teaching method. The first step is practical-theoretical training in-situ for



teaching OKM principles. The second phase, begins to set the tone of creativity. "Because of the distance, being that I have instructors in different countries and I can not live three months in each country, I continue training them on a virtual way. I share with them real events videos and the guys need to analyse those incidents from different angles, not just from the technical one. At the end of this process them, after identifying and pointing at the relevant components, they should transfer the issues discussed, from theory to practice, through the preparation of a series of specific exercises. In the third module, they should shoot short videos with technical and tactical contents and send them to me so that I can see, analyse and send back my observations. "

"The fourth module is the realization of an academic work. They are required to choose a topic, 'for example adapting the principles of OKM training for people with physical limitations. " Some decide to perform work on the issue of decision making under stress, or the management of violent incidents, early identification of suspicious behavior or abnormal behavior, etc. They should define the theme and objective look and detail the theoretical foundations of the subject, and of course, how to put theory into practice through the preparation of a workshop of 5 or 6 sessions, which should present how the chosen subject could be taught in OKM training. The idea is not to stay in theory, but putting theory into practice, because only the theory does not help us. "As an added value, this process helps me keep my mind active as jobs are submitted in English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and French," says Gabi. The last module is again carried out in each of the countries in which each student must implement their academic work in a related training to the specific issue they have chosen - children, decision making, gender violence, etc. Instructors trained by me, have local OKM schools and they carry out various activities such as periodic training for regular trainees and special workshops for entrepreneurs, VIP guards, domestic violence and work with children and young people in schools. " They also help in the organization of courses in Israel. The next course in Israel will be held in April 2016. More than 20 people from Italy have already registered. This is an intensive training that integrates OKM, desert survival and tourism in the Holy Land ".

**How can a regular civilian, get this type of activity?** "In Europe today the main OKM academies are located in Italy, Spain and Greece. While the Operational Krav-Maga is my 'baby', this is not my only activity. My continuous traveling so far has not allowed me to develop a

new generation of OKM instructors in Israel, making it difficult to open a local academy and in turn, continue to travel abroad for periods of one month or more. I intend to conduct short workshops and training in small groups. But while I see those options, the activity abroad grows. For example, these days we are starting to develop the business with three new representatives in Brazil, in addition to my commitment to the Zinman Academy of Physical Education at Wingate. " "After ending a training which I have dictated during Martial Arts Coaches Course at Zinman Academy, approached me some participants wondering where they can participate in my training. My answer was that the nearest academy is located in Athens. What do?, that is the reality. I believe that within the limitations detailed above, I can commit to short workshops at home. Always I have in mind the opening of an academy for the Development of Skills for Life, whose activities would be based on the principles of Operational Krav-Maga , developing additional topics such as leadership, teamwork, decision making, etc. " But to create something at the appropriate level, it is required to find another "crazy" in the subject who will ask how much do we need, let's do it together. "