

[About Us](#)[Donate](#)[Contact Us](#)[Search](#)

[Chizuk & Inspiration](#) / [Inspirational Articles](#)

/ [Blind at Ten: Avi Shadi's Journey of Sound and Spirit](#)

Blind at Ten: Avi Shadi's Journey of Sound and Spirit

By Sarah Pachter

Courtesy of Aish.com

When most five-year-olds are learning to ride a bike or play tag, Avi Shadi was facing a very different challenge. His parents noticed he wasn't walking properly—he kept bumping into walls and furniture. A pediatrician recognized something was wrong with his vision and referred the family to a specialist.

At Children's Hospital in Los Angeles, doctors ran test after test but couldn't determine the problem. Meanwhile, Avi's eyesight continued to decline. Eventually, they discovered a benign tumor growing in his eyes—diagnosed as Bilateral Choroidal Osteoma. This rare condition occurs when calcium builds up behind the retina, blocking vision and eventually leading to blindness. It usually appears in elderly women over seventy; it is extremely rare in men, and almost unheard of in children.

Over the next five years, despite multiple surgeries, Avi's sight gradually faded. By the age of ten, he was completely blind.

"I totally remember color," Avi says. "Since I had ten years of sight, I can still visualize a lot. People who are born blind don't know color—it's not something you can describe. When people explain things to me, I can picture them in my mind's eye. I feel blessed in that way."

Seeing Through Hearing

Avi compensates for his vision loss with heightened hearing. "I feel sound," he explains. "When I hear something, I picture it in my head. Even though I don't officially see, it's as if I still do."

Sound has become Avi's form of sight. "It's my number one modality of perception. I can travel, navigate, and function just by listening to what's around me." His next strongest sense is touch. "People with sight pull information into their brain through their eyes. Now, I 'feed' my brain through sound and touch."

For example, Avi uses an iPad with a screen reader for college assignments. "It reads everything out loud to me," he says. "I also use a Braille keyboard called Brailiant." He's relied on these technologies since learning he would lose his sight.

At nine years old, Avi had to switch schools to learn these adaptive tools. "I didn't want to change schools," he recalls. "I was comfortable with my friends. My old school was two blocks away, and the new one was 30–40 minutes further."

His mother initially drove him, but soon Avi began taking a one-hour bus ride home. By middle school, his commute was more than two hours daily, forcing him to wake at 5:45 a.m. just to arrive on time.

He also had to learn orientation and mobility—how to use a cane and cross

streets safely. “They teach you how to hold the cane, how to move it, and how to listen for traffic. By middle school, I was crossing busy intersections on my own.” He adds humbly, “It’s still something I’m learning. You never stop learning.”

Despite the challenges, Avi adjusted well socially. “I never really faced bullying,” he says. “In elementary school, we were kind of isolated, but by seventh and eighth grade we were fully integrated into mainstream classes. By high school, I was in regular classes, traveling independently across campus.”

Avi noticed two types of reactions from classmates. “Some were shy and didn’t know how to talk to me, so they avoided me. Others were kind, willing to help, and would ask if I needed assistance.”

Getting Into Judaism

Although Avi never attended Jewish school, his diagnosis brought his family closer to Judaism. They began attending synagogue on Shabbat. “I never really cared about Judaism until my mom wanted me to get a one-on-one teacher,” he admits. “I didn’t want to, except I was curious about Hebrew.”

To his surprise, Avi’s tutor made learning enjoyable. “He was a cool guy. I credit him with getting me into Judaism and making it fun.” Today, Avi studies regularly, attends synagogue weekly, and asks his mother to read the Torah portion to him after services. He knows his bar mitzvah Haftara (Vaetchanan) by heart, complete with cantillation.

Music soon became another passion. At nine, Avi began piano lessons with Saeed Dehimi, a musician with low vision whose brother was blind. Dehimi had founded Beyond Vision, a nonprofit supporting visually impaired musicians. After a few years, Avi continued under Shahriar Rohani, brother of renowned Persian composer Anoushiravan Rohani, and has now trained with him for eight years.

“I’ve been playing piano for ten years and have composed several original

pieces,” Avi says. “Sometimes late at night, when I should be asleep, I’m at the piano exploring sounds. It’s therapeutic, cathartic, and fulfilling. I love composing and hope to make an album one day. Music expresses things that are hard to put into words. I like slower, relaxing sounds that release deep emotion.”

Despite the struggles, Avi remains positive. “Everyone around me has always been so encouraging. My parents were probably freaking out inside, but they never showed it. The doctors were kind and always smiling. I never felt sadness around me.”

Avi still remembers his mother’s face and even has a mental image of himself. He organizes his clothing by touch—jeans in one drawer, shirts in another—and refreshes his wardrobe each year before Pesach. As for details like spinach in his teeth? He laughs: “I just shower, get dressed, brush my hair, and hope for the best. Guys don’t care too much about that.”

Becoming a DJ

At 16, Avi discovered DJing. His cousin introduced him to DJ Sepi, a well-known Persian Jewish DJ. “At first I thought it was too visual—how was I going to do this? But we found a way.” Using a specialized mixer and controller, Avi loads songs via USB and memorizes the system’s layout. By counting clicks and scrolls, he navigates playlists without needing sight. “It took a lot of practice, but we made it work.”

His first major gig was a wheelchair basketball tournament for Angel City Sports, a nonprofit supporting athletes with disabilities. That event led to others—baby showers, birthdays, bar and bat mitzvahs, and charity fundraisers for Magen Am. “When I’m DJing, I actually enjoy weddings more,” Avi shares. “If I’m just attending, I can’t really focus. But when I’m controlling the music, I feel connected.”

Today, Avi is intentional about self-growth. He admits he’s hooked on his phone and laptop, even without sight. “It’s not about visuals—I don’t really use

Instagram except for DJ work, or TikTok. My main issue is YouTube. I watch a lot of basketball and sports, and lately I've gotten into politics and entertainment. The addiction isn't visual—it's about chasing that dopamine hit. You get sucked in, not because of what you see, but how it makes you feel.”

He recognizes it affects his productivity. To manage it, Avi began monitoring his usage and even uses AI to schedule his day with time blocks and checklists, which has reduced his screen time.

“From a Jewish perspective, we all have a purpose. But distractions—especially technology—keep us from fulfilling it. If you spend ten hours on your phone and eight sleeping, that leaves only six hours for what really matters. Spend more time discovering your purpose and making an impact. We're here—so we might as well do something meaningful.”

He hopes his story inspires others to pursue their dreams. “Everyone has something they want to do but are afraid to try. When people see someone blind chasing his dreams, they might ask themselves, ‘What's my excuse?’”

Avi's greatest joy comes from helping others reach their potential. “When I accomplish a goal, it feels amazing—but when someone else achieves their goal because I inspired them, we both win.”

USA: Golda Turner | [347-743-4900](tel:347-743-4900) | golda@beineinu.org

ISRAEL: Deena Weinberg | beineinu.beitar@gmail.com

Beineinu is a 501c3 non-profit.

