

How a Pakistani Muslim Became a Zionist

The recent Israeli-Hamas war sparked huge protests in Europe and exposed a growing epidemic of anti-Semitism. But in an interview with CBN News before the summer war between Israel and Hamas, one British Muslim explained how he became a Zionist just by checking out the facts.

Kasim Hafeez is a Pakistani Muslim born, raised and living in the United Kingdom.

“I was brought up around a lot of anti-Israel feeling and especially from my dad, very blatant and direct Israel hatred and anti-Semitism,” Hafeez told CBN News.

As a university student, Hafeez campaigned against the Jewish state, joined protests and called for boycotts of Israel. He said he was even willing to die to free Palestine and rid the world of Israel.

“My narrative was this: there was a Palestinian state, the Jews came from Europe, stole the land, and voila – Israel,” Hafeez said.

Then he found Alan Dershowitz’ book, *The Case for Israel* and decided to read it so he could refute what he thought was “Zionist propaganda.”

“I thought I’ll buy it and be able to disprove it because Israel has no case. I know the history. I’m an expert in it all,” he said.

“So I start reading this book, and the most basic of facts about Israel and the Jewish people I had no clue about. I mean one of the most basic ones I came across was a Palestinian state has never existed,” he added.

Profiles in Racism

And that was just the beginning. Two years later Hafeez visited Israel but got himself into trouble before he ever entered the country.

"When you go to passport control and they say, 'What is the purpose of your visit?' just say you're here for a holiday. Don't say, 'Well, I used to be anti-Semitic and anti-Israel, now I'm not quite sure so I thought I'd come and see what it's like,'" he explained.

After eight hours in airport security, Hafeez was allowed into Israel despite his confession. But the time spent in airport security was a real eye opener.

"It highlighted Israel's unique security situation," he said. "Look it's not politically correct to say this, it's not nice to say this, but people from my background, people with my kind of name have an awful tendency of blowing stuff up in Israel."

Kasim said he was also "treated with a lot of respect" from the security agent who repeatedly offered him coffee and was very apologetic. He compared it to a trip he had taken to Saudi Arabia four years earlier.

"You want to see racism, go to Saudi Arabia as a non-Arab," he said.

A Huge Surprise

After leaving the airport, Hafeez encountered his next surprise when he arrived in Jerusalem and saw the different ethnic and religious groups mixing in the city.

"Be it Muslims, be it people from African heritage, be it European, be it people from the Middle East – it's just such a crazy mix of people. And then you see the signs in English and Hebrew and Arabic and it straight away blows away that idea of

apartheid and racism," he recalled.

Hafeez said he wanted to know how people from Arab backgrounds really felt about living in Israel, so he asked various people, saying it must be "so difficult for you here."

"They look [at you] like you're mentally ill. They look at you as if you have some sort of problem because they look at you like 'no it's actually fine here, we have no problems here,'" he said, smiling.

He was even more confused when he spoke to people who are Druze, a group that has traditionally been persecuted in the Middle East, he said. They told him, "We love it here. You know, this is our home. My son's in the IDF."

He realized he was seeing "the real Israel you won't see in a lot of the Western mainstream media."

He said nothing changes your mind like seeing it for yourself.

Pro-Israel vs. Anti-Arab?

According to Hafeez, family and friends initially thought Israel's Mossad secret service had recruited him. Now some have come around.

"There's this awful idea that people think it's a zero-sum game, that if you stand up for Israel, you're instantly anti-Arab. It's ridiculous," he said.

"I have members of my family who are quite supportive of Israel now, which is nice. But with friends who have now turned their views to be more supportive of Israel, [they] wouldn't say it publicly," he added.

Hafeez said Muslims refuse to accept Israel's existence in the middle of the Arab world. Then there are conspiracy theories and the pack mentality.

"It's kind of ingrained that there's this global conspiracy by the Jews to destroy Islam and take over the world," he said.

"It's really sad but this whole anti-Israel cause has become very popular. It's seen as the cool cause almost, and nobody wants to kind of break off from the kind of pack and be seen as an outsider," he added, saying it was very difficult for him to admit that he had been wrong.

A Revelation about Israel

Nevertheless, Hafeez said, he believes it's possible for Muslims to have a revelation about the Jews and Israel. But to do so they must honestly assess what they believe and be willing to embrace reality.

They need to take a step back and look at the world and what they stand for, he said, and ask themselves if this "irrational hatred over a group of myths" they've been told is really worth giving their lives for it. They need to ask themselves if they really want peace.

"One of the most frustrating things for me is within the Muslim community. We have a double standard," he said. "We judge Israel and America by one standard, which we refuse to apply to ourselves."

Asked if he thought God had played a role in opening his eyes or giving him the desire to ask questions, Hafeez said his "a-ha" moment came at the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

"I sincerely believe that things don't just happen, everything happens for a reason. I believe I'm on a particular path, I don't know where the destination will end, but I feel I'm very blessed to be where I am," he told CBN News.

"Because it has changed my life for the better, you know. It's beautiful to wake up without this hatred, without this anger, you know and I feel so lucky and so blessed," he said. "Is it

God? I don't know. Maybe. It's very difficult to say."