

Muslim to Jewish convert, researcher, and activist Khaled Hassan talks Israel - interview

Researcher and activist Khaled Hassan opens up about his journey from Cairo to Judaism and discusses antisemitism, activism, and media bias.

By OHAD MERLIN
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“It was a very happy childhood,” Khaled Hassan, 34, told The Jerusalem Post from his home in the UK. A national security and foreign policy researcher and social media activist, Hassan elaborated on his childhood in Cairo in the middle-class Maadi neighborhood. “It’s one of the oldest and most diverse neighborhoods in the city, with many diplomats living there, including the Israeli ambassador.”

Hassan was born to a Muslim family, which he described as “open-minded, secular, and middle class.” He attended an American school, where his

education was almost entirely in English, except for religion and Arabic studies. “I believe having English made me who I am today because it allowed me to access narratives completely opposed to what I saw around me,” he said.

Hassan developed an interest in politics, international relations, and security, which he studied at university. Later on, he was employed at the [UN](#) and worked his way up, becoming acquainted with key personalities in the Egyptian political sphere.

“At some point, I became intrigued by Judaism,” he said. “As part of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which I call ‘the Muslim Jewish conflict,’ I was very curious to learn and read about Judaism and find different narratives and perspectives.”

This interest led Hassan to venture into an unusual ordeal in the staunch anti-Israel atmosphere of his native Egypt, and he eventually enrolled in an online course at Tel Aviv University. “It was fascinating to see how it’s a completely different narrative from what I grew up with. This course was an important piece of how I came to build my personality today,” he reminisced.

In 2014, Hassan met Israelis for the very first time. “It

was a shared program with Egyptians, Jordanians, Palestinians, and Israelis in Cyprus. It was a turning point for me. Until then, I supported the Arab Peace Initiative,” he explained, referring to the 2002 roadmap tabled by Saudi Arabia that called inter alia for a full Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders and a de facto patriation in Israel of descendants of 1948 Palestinian refugees in exchange for normalization with the entire Arab world.

“I believed that if Egypt and Israel could have had peace – albeit hardly felt and cold, but still peace with no bloodshed – then surely, Palestinians and everyone else also can. But the time I spent there with Palestinians made me realize that peace is not achievable with them. Now I hardly think that they deserve their own state, as whatever they are given will always be seen as a stepping stone for more land and more wars with Israel,” he said.

“In 2016, I converted to Judaism,” Hassan mentioned casually; a golden Menorah was shining in the background of the room. “I would say that I never really grew up as a practicing Muslim. I went to a mixed American school. I had a girlfriend. I used to drink. I lived a Western lifestyle. But at the end of the day, I realized that Judaism aligns with my values best.”

Hassan also explored Christianity, especially the Coptic Church – the ancient Egyptian autochthonous sect of Christianity. “Though it was fascinating in a historical manner, it didn’t align with my theological point of view. I was always more interested in Judaism, and I guess it’s also part of my rebellion against the norms. See, Jews were seen as pure evil, and so I had to go in that direction,” he added sarcastically.

Hassan described the inherently antisemitic atmosphere he grew up in. “My dad was a teacher who taught German. He was very proud of Hitler and showed admiration for Nazism. He was completely apolitical and claimed that politics is a disease that infects anyone who gets too near,” he said, adding that reverence for the Nazis was there nonetheless.

“Being antisemitic is in every Egyptian's DNA. I always heard nasty comments, all normalized and used by people from all walks of society, billionaires and poor people alike,” Hassan continued.

“That’s not to say that all will actively attack a Jew if they see one. Some, mainly Islamists, would really hurt Jews. Others, the more secular and nationalists, would say something but not act physically. But regardless, every single person I met in Egypt is an antisemite. I’ll rephrase it: I’ve never met an Egyptian who is not an

antisemite, whether Islamist or nationalist-secular,” he added, somberly.

When asked if there was any way to fix this situation, Hassan paused for a bit and commented, “People in the West must understand that Arab societies work differently from Israel or the UK. Let’s say that tomorrow an Islamist president wins the elections in the UK or the US; it’s not like all of society would immediately change. In Saudi Arabia, for example, before the leadership of Crown Prince MBS (Mohammad Bin Salman), whom I wholeheartedly support and admire, driving cars was considered haram (religiously banned) for women, and both society and clergy mostly agreed with it, coming up with arguments to back these ideals.

Once MBS took over the leadership, the same clergy found other reasons to justify the current position, and that’s what happens in society. Norms are dictated from the top down; the president says this is forbidden, and everyone complies. You can reject and say whatever you want, but this is how things work around here,” he clarified, adding that this could be the way to begin solving the conundrum of antisemitism in the Arab world.

First visit to Israel

In early September, Hassan visited Israel for the first time. When asked about his experience in the Holy Land, he replied, “Frankly, nothing surprised me. I’ve known Israelis for such a long time, I’ve worked with them a lot. I knew that Israel is a fascinating place with many security-related challenges.”

He also witnessed the arrest of terrorists during the visit. “Everything I saw lived up to my expectations,” he said. “Israel has this vibe or energy; it makes you feel alive. It’s a Middle Eastern country in the sense that it’s alive. People talk loudly; they’re energetic. Once you experience it, it becomes like an addiction that makes you want to go back again.

“I would sum Israel up as a dream come true in the heart of the Middle East,” he added. “You can be openly gay; you can be whatever you want. I went to meet whom the media tends to call ‘the settlers,’ pictured with guns and many children. I tried to meet everyone, from the Right and the Left – except, maybe, from the far-Left, but they would probably not like to meet me anyway.

“I took taxis a lot. Half of my drivers were Arab Muslims, and you can only guess whether your driver will be Jewish or Muslim. Is this apartheid?” he asked teasingly.

Nevertheless, Hassan also experienced heavy security

measures at the airport. “I was taken to interrogation, but I understood it completely. They see a Khaled Hassan who was born in Egypt, where over 99% don’t believe Israel should exist, arriving at their airport in the middle of a war, and then claiming that he has converted. This surely raises many questions. I wouldn’t expect anyone to let me in without questioning. So, they took me aside, asked some questions, I answered, and they said Shabbat Shalom and welcome.

“And it’s not like immigration officers in the US or UK are kind-hearted,” he added.

When asked about his favorite part of the visit, Hassan pointed out the culture and the people. “Just walking around Tel Aviv and Jerusalem was so special. It’s ironic to think that the place where I come from has been at war with Israel since the moment it was established, and its society celebrates the October 7 attack as if it were heroic. But when I’m in Israel and I tell my taxi driver that I’m Egyptian, they’re excited. They welcome me; they offer suggestions for what to see and eat. To me, it’s exceptionally fascinating that when they meet someone from ‘the other side,’ the first thing they offer is hospitality.

“Israel is such a mature society; they don’t hate people based on who they are or where they’re from. I took a

train, asked about a station, and people just started talking to me. They saw I was a tourist, and all I got was kindness and compassion. This would never happen to an Israeli or a Jew in Egypt, and so I found it a bit of a surreal experience.”

Social media activism

Since the beginning of the war, Hassan noticed that his X account was becoming increasingly popular, reaching over 75,000 followers as of the day of this interview. “I’ve always been involved in issues surrounding antisemitism and terrorism, but I used to do this in a lower profile. I started to speak up because I wanted my voice to reach decision-makers.”

Hassan realizes that many regard him as an odd bird due to his background. “I know how I’m perceived,” he said. “The BBC once reached out to me following a comment I had made comparing those who deny the necessity of sending armaments to Israel to antisemites. They were supposedly interested in interviewing me, but that never happened. Obviously, Zionists and Jews alike tell me that they appreciate me, which is great but not at all a surprise.

What does surprise me is how everyone on the other side seems to completely avoid me. Some say I’m a Mossad agent and/or part of a propaganda scheme,

although I never got a penny from any government. Those who avoid or ignore me do so because I don't fit into their narrative and because I raise questions they don't want to raise, such as, 'Why do 50% of British Muslims sympathize with the October 7 attacks?' So, for them it's 'avoid this guy at any cost,' and that's how it works."

In his online activism, Hassan also took an important part in the research that led to the groundbreaking report sponsored by British-Israeli lawyer Trevor Asserson, published a couple of weeks ago, that presented jaw-dropping findings regarding the inherent anti-Israel bias on BBC, including over 1,500 breaches of the public broadcaster's editorial guidelines regarding impartiality, accuracy, editorial values, and public interest.

"For me, it showed that the BBC is institutionally antisemitic by promoting falsehoods and twisting the narrative in a way in which Israel can never be right and Palestinians can do no wrong," he explained.

"BBC's outlets in Arabic are even worse, but unfortunately, they dismissed the report and haven't invited anyone to challenge or discuss our findings, and we're not very hopeful that they ever will."

When asked about his message to pro-Israel voices, Hassan stressed, "We must stay united, listen to everyone, and talk to everyone – each and every ally,

Jewish or not. This is not a conflict over land; it's about global Jihad vs. the Jews. This is how it should be treated, and this is why this war must be won. We defeated Hitler in the past, and now it's the Islamist neo-Nazis. Obviously, there are many amazing Muslim allies too, including in places like the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

We shouldn't be hostile or suspicious of Muslims or of anyone. If this person in front of you supports Israel's right to exist and defend itself, then this is an ally. Otherwise, this is an enemy who wishes ill for us, and we should identify them and call them out accordingly."

<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-822728>