I was born to hate Jews. It was part of my life. I never questioned it. I was not born in Iran or Syria. I was born in England. My parents moved there from Pakistan. Theirs was the typical immigrant story: Move to the West in the hope of making a better life for themselves and their children.

We were a devout Muslim family, but not extremist or radical in any way. We only wished the best for everyone -- everyone except the Jews. The Jews, we believed, were aliens living in stolen Muslim land, occupiers who were engaged in a genocide against the Palestinian people. Our hatred, therefore, was justified and righteous. And it made me and my friends vulnerable to the arguments of radical extremists. If the Jews were as evil as we had always believed, mustn't those who support them – Christians, Americans, and others in the West – be just as evil?

Beginning in the 1990s, speakers and teachers at mosques and in schools began to endlessly repeat this theme: We were not Western. We were not British. We were Muslims, first and only. Our loyalty was to our religion and to our fellow Muslims. We owed nothing to the Western nations that welcomed us. As Westerners, they were our enemies.

All of this had its desired effect. At least, it did on me. It changed the way that I saw the world. I began to see the suffering of Muslims, including in Britain, as the fault of Western imperialism. The West was at war with us, and the Jews controlled the West. My experience at university in Britain only enhanced my increasingly radical beliefs. Hating Israel was a badge of honor. Stage an anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian rally and you were sure to draw a large, approving crowd.

While at university I decided the protests and propaganda against Israel were not enough. True jihad demanded violence. So I made plans to join the real fight. I would leave college and join a terrorist training camp in Pakistan. But, fortunately for me, fate intervened – in a bookstore.

I came across a book called The Case for Israel by Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz. The case for Israel? What case could there be? The title itself made me furious, and I began to read the pages almost as an act of defiance. How ill-informed, how stupid, could this guy be to defend the indefensible? Well, he was a Jew. That had to be the answer. Still, I read. And what I read challenged all of my dogmas about Israel and the Jews: I read that it wasn't Israel that created the Palestinian refugee crisis; it was the Arab countries, the United Nations, and the corrupt Palestinian leadership. I read that Jews didn't exploit the Holocaust to create the state of Israel; the movement to create a modern Jewish state dated back to the 19th century, and ultimately to the beginnings of the Jewish people almost 4,000 years ago. And I read that

Israel is not engaged in genocide against the Palestinians. On the contrary, the Palestinian population has actually doubled in just twenty years.

All this did was make me angrier. I needed to prove Dershowitz wrong, to see with my own eyes how racist and oppressive Israel really was. So I bought a plane ticket. I would travel to Israel, the home of my enemy. And that's when everything changed. Everything.

What I saw with my own eyes was even more challenging than what Dershowitz had written. Instead of apartheid, I saw Muslims, Christians and Jews coexisting. Instead of hate, I saw acceptance, even compassion. I saw a raucous, modern, liberal democracy, full of flaws, certainly, but fundamentally decent. I saw a country that wanted nothing more than to live in peace with its neighbors. I saw my hatred melting before my eyes. I knew right then what I had to do.

Too many people on this planet are consumed with the same hatred that consumed me. They have been taught to despise the Jewish State – many Muslims by their religion; many others by their college professors or student groups.

So here is my challenge to anyone who feels this way: do what I did – seek out the truth for yourself. If the truth can change me, it can change anyone.

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