

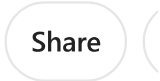
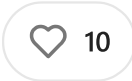
Raised on hate

TEL AVIV — Two men from Gaza, born under the same sky and taught the same hatred, now live on opposite sides of a moral divide. One risked his life to become Jewish. The other defends Hamas.



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TEL AVIV — Two men from Gaza, born under the same sky and taught the same hatred, now live on opposite sides of a moral divide. One risked his life to become Jewish. The other defends Hamas as a product of Israeli oppression. Both say they want peace.

I met Dor Shachar in a quiet corner of a Tel Aviv hotel lobby. He didn't speak English and brought an interpreter who sat beside him, translating as Dor spoke with fierce conviction. His gaze rarely shifted, even as his interpreter translated. His story began in Khan Yunis, Gaza, where he said he was taught from his first day in school that Jews were monsters.

At his UNRWA school, Dor recalled teachers describing Jews as creatures with “one eye in the middle of their forehead and three legs.” The students practiced throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. “We chanted ‘Kill the Jews,’” he said. “Forty-nine children in my class shouted together, and I was the only one who didn't join.”

He remembered his grandfather inviting Israeli soldiers to drink tea, then telling him they must be killed for “eating the bread of our land.” His uncles, he said, were among the first tunnel builders in Rafah. Once, when he was a boy, he saw the severed head of a man rolling down the street. It was that of a man accused of collaborating with Israel. “They said he was a traitor,” Dor said softly. “The man who killed him was our neighbor.”

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Since the ceasefire, several videos have surfaced showing Hamas fighters torturing suspected “traitors” — breaking their bones with rocks and metal pipes before executing them, as civilians stand by and watch.

As Dor grew older, he began to doubt what he'd been taught. He had seen Israeli soldiers share food and candy with children. "I knew something was wrong," he said. "They lied to us."

Dor said that after escaping Gaza, he worked illegally in Israel until police caught him. When Israeli authorities realized he was from Gaza, they deported him back. There Hamas accused him of being a collaborator and imprisoned him for seven months. "They beat me, burned me, electrocuted me," he said. "They told me I could bring honor to my family only by killing Jews."

After escaping again, Dor settled in Israel, where a religious Jewish family helped him convert. Now in his mid-forties, he lives as an Orthodox Jew and speaks publicly about Hamas's rule. "Hamas and the civilians are the same," he said. "They teach their children to hate from birth."

For Dor, the conflict is not political but moral and religious. "It's *jihad ad-din*," he said — a holy war. "The West wants to believe it's about land, but it's not. It's about ideology." When asked about peace, he shook his head. "Peace is not possible until they change education. Until they stop teaching children to kill."

A few days later in Jerusalem, I spoke to Khaled — not his real name — over Zoom from Ramallah. He is wanted by Hamas and agreed to speak only if his identity was concealed. Our local guide said he had known Khaled through youth programs that bring Jewish and Muslim children together.

Khaled began in English, explaining that he too grew up hating Jews. "In Gaza, we were taught everything bad was because of the occupation," he said. Like Dor, he attended an UNRWA school — but unlike Dor, he remembered it fondly. "They gave me a good education," he said.

As a boy, Khaled crossed into Israel to wash dishes in a restaurant. Seeing the comforts of Israeli life compared to Gaza made him angry. "I hated them more," he said. The

restaurant owner told him that if he wanted to work in front of customers, he'd have to learn Hebrew. Within a few months, Khaled could speak fluently enough to greet customers and take orders. The owner, impressed, promoted him to the front.

One day, an older Israeli woman named Jessica started asking him about his life. She bought him a pair of new shoes — the first he'd ever owned. "I was taught never to accept anything from Jews," Khaled said, "but I couldn't resist." When she hugged him, he said it was the first hug he'd ever received. "It was like a mother and son relationship," he said.

It was the same story he'd told to many Western groups. But when he finished, his tone changed. His voice tightened, and his body language shifted. Peace, he said, was impossible "as long as Israel occupies Palestinian land." Life under occupation, he said, was not "normal." Until it was, expecting peace from a Palestinian was impossible.

Asked whether there was a difference between Hamas fighters and civilians, Khaled said there was — that Hamas should disarm but be allowed to run politically. He denied that the Palestinian Authority's "pay to slay" policy existed, calling reports of it "Israeli propaganda." The policy, run by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, provides stipends to families of Palestinians imprisoned or killed for attacking Israel.

Khaled insisted that most Palestinians did not support the October 7 attacks. But when pressed to name what Palestinians or Hamas had done wrong, he grew frustrated. "It's because of the occupation," he said. "You can't expect us to behave normally when Israel controls the borders."

His frustration grew as the questions continued. When asked whether democracy should come before or after statehood, he replied, "You can't expect democracy when life isn't normal." To him, "normal" meant living without Israeli checkpoints. International aid, he said, would help Palestinians become democratic once the occupation ended.

When asked what democracy meant to him, Khaled became agitated. “We can’t talk about democracy while we’re occupied,” he said again. Every answer circled back to the same point — nothing could change until Israel changed first.

Dor and Khaled were born in the same strip of land, attended the same schools, and were raised by the same culture. Both were taught to hate, and both met Jews who treated them with kindness. From that point, their paths split.

Dor came to believe that everything he’d been taught was a lie. Khaled decided the lie was Israel itself.

To Dor, the West is naïve for believing Gaza’s civilians are separate from Hamas. He insists Hamas and Gaza are one and says peace will come only when Gaza changes. Dor warns that the world is blind to what he calls “the ideology of hate.”

Khaled, meanwhile, believes Israel is cruel for refusing to trust Palestinians. He calls Hamas a symptom of a deeper problem and says peace depends on Israel changing first. Khaled says the world is blind to the pain of occupation.

Both say they want peace. Only one believes it begins with himself.

Thank you to the Exigent Foundation for facilitating my visit to Israel.

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