

// I WAS WRONG //

Michael Gamal once helped spread hatred against Israel and the Jewish people. Now he dedicates his life to exposing the lies he once promoted and making amends for the damage he helped cause.

By Malkie Schulman



“I WAS WRONG”

Michael (right) with former hostage Eli Sharabi



Today, 38-year-old Michael Gamal is a Noahide and pro-Israel advocate. However, his journey to that point has been anything but linear. Michael was born in Massachusetts, the son of Coptic Christian immigrants from Egypt. Copts are a Christian ethnoreligious group

native to Egypt and the largest Christian community in the Middle East. Although they speak Arabic and are culturally Arab, they are widely considered to be descendants of the ancient Egyptians. They have also historically faced persecution under Muslim rule.

Growing up with his three younger brothers, Michael says he saw himself as an American whose parents happened to be Egyptian. It wasn't until his family moved to California during his teenage years that he began wrestling with questions of identity. "After 9/11, I was identified as an Arab by other Americans. It made me feel resentful, because technically I was Coptic and not Arab, and it planted the seeds for what was to come later." When he eventually went to college and met Arabs and Muslims for the first time, many of them second-generation Americans like himself, he found the identity he had been seeking. While his parents sought to distance themselves from Muslim influence, Michael increasingly moved toward it. Much to their consternation, over the next two decades he became progressively more radicalized. "As a Muslim, you don't start out calling for the death of Jews, or at least I didn't. But the truth is that if you want to have a social life as an Arab in America, you have to be anti-Israel." In Michael's experience, Coptic Christians are usually either pro-Israel or neutral except for the under-30 crowd. "Like many young Americans from all backgrounds, they start getting influenced by social media and begin falling for the lies," he says. When Michael started tending toward extremism around the age of 17, his father tried to warn him. "He said to me, 'Habibi, you don't know what you're getting into. This is a bad path. You have no idea what these Muslims did to us back home. It's a dangerous movement.'" But at the time, Michael just brushed off his words. "I thought he was Islamophobic and antiquated."

THE MAKING OF AN EXTREMIST

Michael traces the beginning of his radicalization to what he was reading online as a teenager and the Muslim students he encountered on campus. "At first, I wanted to believe they were moderates who genuinely wanted peace. I quickly discovered that nobody was truly interested in that." He remembers being in a hookah bar when he was 18 years old and having a conversation with a Palestinian man. This was shortly after the Second Intifada. When the subject of a two-state solution came up, "The guy said to me, 'Absolutely not! There is no such thing as Israel. Only Palestine.' I asked him, 'What about harming civilians? You're against that, right?' He replied, 'There are no Israeli civilians. They are either future IDF soldiers, current IDF soldiers or former IDF soldiers.' I was in shock. I asked him, 'What about suicide bombers? You can't be okay with that,

correct?’ ‘They are our only weapon,’ he said.”

Michael says that even back then an alarm bell sounded. “There was something off about this so-called religion of peace. It took me decades to work it through, but that conversation was the first hint that the anti-Israel rhetoric was really anti-Jewish. It was all a smokescreen.”

For a long time, Michael rationalized what he was hearing. “Whenever I’d hear them support committing murder and atrocities, I thought they didn’t really mean it. I thought they were just passionate in their desire for freedom for their people.” Eventually, however, he acquired the same mindset. “I became an extremist myself. I was putting out all the same hate propaganda that my friends did.”

In college, Michael attended meetings hosted by the Middle East Student Union and Students for Justice in Palestine. He and his friends also participated in Israel Apartheid Week at Caltech.

“Eventually, I stopped attending SJP because I noticed that most of the people there weren’t even Arab,” Michael shares. “They were American. I realized that the whole point of the organization was to indoctrinate American kids and turn them into Middle Eastern zealots. I was already part of the Middle Eastern community; it wasn’t meant for me.”

After college, Michael followed his own career path but remained active online, first on Facebook and later on TikTok and Instagram. “I didn’t have my name on my profile because I was afraid it would hurt my business, but that didn’t stop me from regularly posting rabid anti-Israel content. But the worst thing I was doing was not only encouraging others to hate but helping them sound intelligent while doing it.”

Unfortunately, it wasn’t hard to win people over to his cause. “The more active you are online, the more people engage with you, ask questions and become receptive to your ideas,” he explains.

In early 2021, Michael formally converted to Islam. The decision was precipitated, in part, by attending his Syrian friend’s wedding in New Jersey and spending time

with him. “We were hanging out when he suddenly said, ‘I have to go pray.’ I thought, *Wow! I can’t imagine going from having fun to stopping everything you’re doing to pray.* I was impressed by that kind of dedication to G-d. I’d never felt that kind of connection. I wanted that.”

Even before the wedding, Michael had begun watching Muslim religious videos online. “I watched sheiks giving sermons, and what they said resonated with me. I liked the emphasis on universal values and good family relationships, which I discovered afterward was just bait to suck in ignorant Westerners. But the real reason I

“I realized that the whole point of [SJP] was to indoctrinate American kids and turn them into Middle Eastern zealots.”

converted was that it validated the hatred I had for Jews and Israel.”

Michael says that he was never particularly observant. “I never fasted for Ramadan. I didn’t pray five times a day. I went to the mosque maybe eight times over three years. I supported the rights of Egyptian Christians to live as equals. This was all further proof that I converted for ideological reasons rather than theological ones, which is probably why it fell apart so quickly.”

His family wasn’t happy about his con-

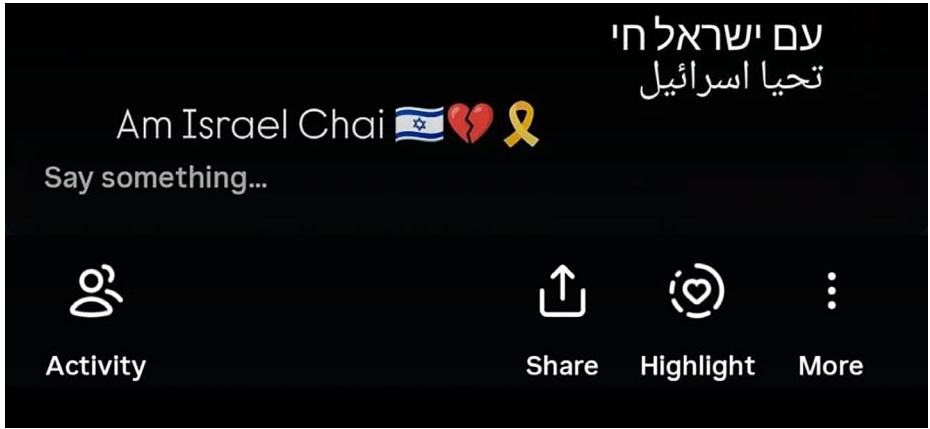
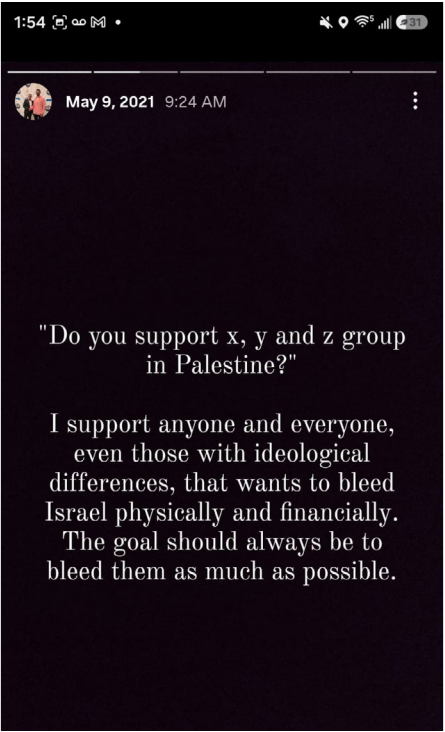


(Above and right) Anti-Israel social media posts formerly made by Michael
(Far right) A more recent social media post about Michael, showing the changes he has made

version, but their reaction surprised him. “I thought they would never speak to me again,” Michael says. “My dad hates Islam so much that he makes Ben-Gvir look like Ehud Barak. I think he was in denial about my conversion, and that’s why he didn’t disown me. He would talk to me about Islam as if I wasn’t a Muslim.” Michael’s mother was less vehement in her opposition; what disturbed her more was the increasingly extreme content he posted online. “My mother would tell me, ‘I worry about you.’”

“I wish I could say that October 7 was the moment I recognized the truth, but that’s not what happened,” Michael shares. “As horrible as it sounds, my chat friends and I actually thought it was a great thing.”

A week later, when more details about the attacks emerged, Michael’s automatic response was denial. “Some of the horrors being described were another level of depravity. My friends insisted that those atrocities never happened and were nothing but Zionist lies. They said that you



Caption

can’t trust Jews and Israelis.”

A couple of weeks later, Michael’s father invited him out to lunch so they could talk. “My father never talked politics, because we were always butting heads at that point. He would often just walk out of the room when we got into it, but now he felt that we needed to have a conversation. He had worked as an interpreter for the US Navy in Iraq from 2003 to 2010, and he told me about the atrocities that had been committed by Iraqis against other Iraqis.

“What Hamas did to the Israelis on October 7 is what the Sunnis and Shiites were doing to each other during the Iraq War, and ISIS later directed that same brutality on the Shiites a few years later,” he said. I remember his words having a real impact on me. I didn’t even push back. I thought to myself, *Wow! This is what I’m supporting?*

About a week later, while out with a friend, they stopped at a red light next to a utility box covered with posters of the hostages being held in Gaza. “I looked at them

and recalled pictures I’d seen online of protestors defacing similar posters. I thought to myself, *Michael, you might be a horrible person for what you support, but you’re not so far gone that you would do something like that.* It was like an out-of-body experience. I felt the blood in my veins evaporate for a good 15 seconds. It felt like forever.”

Till today, Michael says that the defacement of those posters stands out as one of the most heartless things he’s ever witnessed. “Living in the Arab world, you get desensitized. You see a lot of violence and butchery all the time. I don’t know why, but to me the poster incident was beyond cruel. Most people would feel awful seeing a lost dog poster being torn apart or defaced, and these were human beings. They hadn’t done anything to anyone.

“It became a battle of emotions,” Michael continues. “I hadn’t started out anti-Semitic. For years I had flickers of sympathy and humanitarianism—not many, but they were there. I had to actively suppress compassion for Israelis and completely numb the part of me that’s supposed to feel any-



Michael on a livestream

thing humane. But when I saw those posters, I saw human beings, not “Zionist pigs.”

THE TURNAROUND

About a month later, Michael was disturbed to see public figures like Andrew Tate and Candace Owens embracing the pro-Palestinian cause. Andrew Tate was one of the biggest influencers on the Internet when serious allegations surrounding him became public. “He immediately converted to Islam and gained an enormous following. My friends fell in love with him despite all the red flags. People were supporting him just because he was Muslim. But I despised him for his alleged crimes. To realize that I was on the same side as someone like that was tough for me. I felt dirty, as if I had to take a shower.”

In Michael’s opinion, Candace Owens is a grifter, someone who exploits people’s trust to her advantage. “I remember thinking, *If I feel this way about Tate and Owens, what does that make me?* I told myself, ‘Michael, you are everything you hate about these people!’”

As time passed, he increasingly felt alienated from those around him. When

the IRGC launched missiles at Israel, many of his friends cheered and condemned the Arab countries that cooperated with Israel, calling them cowards. “Of course Israel had every right to respond after October 7. It occurred to me that my friends simply wanted to see the world burn, regardless of whether the victims were Arab or Israeli. Their attitude was: Let’s destroy Israel and see what happens next.”

Soon Michael began quietly dismantling his online identity. “I took everything down. The first thing to go was ‘Free Palestine.’ I just thought, *I’m done with this.*” For a short time he tried to adopt what he calls a “naïve Western mindset.” “I thought that maybe both sides could get along. I decided I wasn’t going to hate Israelis anymore. I wanted nothing to do with the conflict.”

That feeling lasted a few weeks until the day he learned that one of the hostages being held in Gaza, Noa Argamani, had been rescued. “I was happy because I thought that once all the hostages were released the war would be over, and the quicker it ended the better.” What disgusted him was the reaction from people he had once agreed with.

“I heard Palestinian comedian Sammy Obeid say that if he were ever held hostage and civilians had to die to rescue him, they should leave him there. It was one of the most disingenuous things I’d ever heard. It made me wonder: What would I do if my mother had been kidnapped? What should an entire nation do if their loved ones were taken? I got so mad.”

After Hezbollah rockets killed a dozen Druze children and injured many others on a soccer field in 2024, Michael began initiating conversations with Israelis online. “A lot of Arabs were going on social media to antagonize Israelis. I wanted to actually talk to them to see what it was like.”

He admits that those first few exchanges weren’t entirely honest. “I didn’t tell them I was pro-Palestinian. I wanted to first gauge how they were feeling.” He ended up forming genuine friendships. One Israeli friend had connections to Majdal Shams, the Druze town in northern Israel near the Syrian border where the children were killed, and through those relationships he saw Israelis grieving in a way he had conditioned himself not to see.

He was also paying closer attention to the news. While Hezbollah initially took credit for the attack, once they realized that they had struck Druze children, they denied responsibility and blamed the Iron Dome. “It was obvious that they were lying,” Michael says, at which point he began to push back publicly. “I went on pro-Palestinian sites and shared that information. I did advocacy for the first time.” The response was quick. “Whoever saw what I’d posted immediately blocked me.”

By the beginning of 2025, Michael realized that something else had occurred. “I actually liked defending Israel.” He forced himself to learn more, not just about the conflict but about the institutions involved.

“I didn’t know how corrupt UNRWA was or that their goal was to keep Palestinians perpetual refugees. I started noticing

how the Free Palestine movement had trained me to circumvent facts and believe that Israel was always to blame. I compare it to drug or alcohol addiction,” he explains. “It rewires your reward system. You get rewarded for reaching the same conclusion every time regardless of the facts. I see the world now with sober vision. I enjoy what I do because I never have to lie to defend Israel, which is what I had to constantly do to justify the pro-Palestinian narrative.”

While Michael maintains that leaving Islam wasn’t difficult, it was painful to lose his community of friends. “My friends had no idea when I started having regrets. I thought, *Why rock the boat?* I’d known some of them for 20 years.”

Three of his closest friends had been part of his life since he was a teenager. They had no idea that Michael was leading a double life. “We were still in the same WhatsApp chat. When I started posting less frequently, one of my friends reached out to see if I was okay. I told him I needed a break.”

Then Michael received a message that severed the connection forever. “Someone sent me a video about Hitler and Palestine. It was captioned, ‘Did Hitler Know Something That We Didn’t?’ I didn’t even click on it. I finally realized that our differences were irreconcilable.” He removed himself from the chat. Then he spontaneously recorded a 20-minute video that he posted on his personal profile that’s still up today. “I wanted my new Jewish friends to know my history, because they didn’t know my story either.”

Again, the fallout was immediate. “Almost all of my friends blocked me. I knew I’d finally burned all my bridges behind me. In one night, I said goodbye to everything and everyone I knew.”

Sitting alone afterward, he wondered if he had made a terrible mistake. “I sat on my couch and thought, *What did I just do?*” What surprised him most was the response from Jews and Israelis. “I was so nervous. I expected them to hate me. Instead, I was stunned. They were very forgiving.”

A short while later, Michael realized that what felt even lonelier than losing friends was not having anyone to talk to about what he’d experienced. “I knew that my voice could travel further. Maybe other people were experiencing doubts. Maybe I could help them.” He created a community page on Instagram and connected with others who had undergone similar transformations.

Michael eventually joined Clarity Coalition, an international network of Muslims, ex-Muslims, scholars and activists opposed to Islamist extremism. “We fight back against political Islam creeping into society,” he says. “I’m on multiple social media platforms where I try to expose the lies of the Muslim extremists through posts and interviews. I’m also occasionally invited to speak.”

Nevertheless, Michael insists that he isn’t trying to persuade everyone. His target audience isn’t those who are deeply commit-

ted to the Palestinian cause. “There’s no hope in changing them. I try to reach the semi-neutral observers who are still formulating an opinion.”

Michael doesn’t dismiss the possibility of danger. “My parents worry that I’m going to get killed. The danger is there for sure, and it’s heightened because of my background.” But the threat he worries about the most isn’t connected to leaving Islam. “Defending Israel is a lot riskier than being an ex-Muslim. Muslim extremists carry out violence against Muslims all the time. You don’t see Hispanics killing other Hispanics over religion. The pro-Palestinian movement is Islamic-style violence, even if most of the people doing it aren’t Muslim. I used to be part of that world, so I know how incredibly violent it can get.”

The Bibas family tattoo on Michael’s arm serves as a constant reminder of why he continues to speak out publicly. “I got it for the same reason I do this work: to remind the world that evil exists and that I have an obligation to try to repair some of the damage I’ve done. I never physically harmed anyone, but I was articulate. I write well. People would come to me for arguments they couldn’t articulate themselves, and I’d help them write virulent posts against Israelis and Jewish people. I did that willingly.

“I contributed to an environment that

**People like
your readers,
who learned in
yeshivah and
were raised with
emunah, know
that Torah saves
and protects us.**



A post Michael shared above the Bibas boys

cultivated hatred. That’s on me for the rest of my life. I owe it to myself, to Jewish people and to the Western world to do whatever I can to make amends. I believe this is a spiritual war as well, and if you’re not actively speaking out, you’re just standing on the sidelines watching the world deteriorate. I know I can make a difference, even if I can’t always gauge how much of a difference I’m making.” Michael’s Instagram handle is @KopticKaparrah. “I want to make a *kaparah* for the harm I’ve caused,” he says.

Michael believes that the rise in anti-Semitism is the result of multiple forces converging at once. “We’re living in an age where people’s attention spans are 30 seconds long. That’s a huge problem.” He attributes it in part to a concerted social media campaign over the course of many years to influence the minds of America’s youth by Iran, China and Russia and their ilk. “They’re attempting to sow discord among Americans and throughout the Western world, and they’ve been very successful. America today is a country struggling with identity.

“What really frightens me,” he continues, “is that we live in an age where terror attacks happen live on screen and people still don’t believe them. Bondi Beach gets caught on camera and people say that the Mossad did it. We’re experiencing both an information crisis and an identity crisis. The political landscape has changed so much. Elements of both the right and left have become unrecognizable because of extremists.”

Michael believes that many Jews, particularly secular Jews, lack the depth of knowledge needed to respond to the barrage of claims surrounding the conflict. “If a young Jewish person had a minimum baseline of information, he wouldn’t be as vulnerable when somebody shoves pictures of suffering babies in front of him and blames him for it. You have to educate yourself,” he urges. “Get that knowledge. Understand that you’re in a spiritual war and treat it accordingly. Wear your Judaism like a crown. No more concessions to these people! Don’t say, ‘I know, but...’ Never try to compromise and meet anti-Semites halfway.”

THE NOAHIDE PATH

When he began speaking up for those he had previously defamed, Michael realized how little he actually knew about Jews and Judaism. “I thought Judaism was basically ‘diet Christianity.’ My mother had always told me that Judaism was the first half of Christianity. I was 37 years old and realized I knew nothing.”

He contacted a local *shul* and asked if he could visit. “I enjoyed my *shul* experience. I started reading books about Judaism. For a while I even considered taking an introduction to Judaism course to check out conversion.”

Ultimately, that was not the path Michael chose. “I believe that Jews are G-d’s chosen people. They’re chosen for obligation. They’re doing the heavy lifting. Not everybody plays the same position in basketball. My position is to be a Noahide and advocate for the Jewish people and Israel. I’ve never felt closer to G-d than I do today. To a secular person it probably sounds kooky, but I feel Hashem’s presence. So much has happened to me that I can’t explain. I can only chalk it up to G-d.”

Michael says that his journey to becoming a Noahide was partially influenced by Rabbi Tovia Singer, whose videos he initially encountered for different reasons. “Muslims love Rabbi Singer because he disproves the Trinity. I always thought he was intelligent. Then one day I heard Rabbi Singer talking about *Bnei Noach* and it made sense to me. I knew I believed in one G-d. The stories in the Bible resonated with me. It was only the New Testament I couldn’t connect to.”

Michael wanted to deepen his spirituality, but he didn’t believe in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism. “I started doing research into what it meant to be a Noahide. It felt like a safe middle ground for me. I interviewed Rabbi Singer, and he interviewed me. We became close.” Michael appreciates the idea that a person can embrace the Jewish understanding of G-d without converting.

Today, Michael owns a Noahide prayer book and describes much of the practice

as self-directed. “You have to seek it out yourself. What I like about being a Noahide is that it’s a personal connection to G-d. I feel it every day when I read and study. I am incredibly lucky to be where I am. In my opinion, it’s impossible to explain how things happen without believing in Divine Providence.”

According to Michael, his family has embraced his current religious practice. “Basically,” he says with a laugh, “they’re just thrilled I’m no longer Muslim. Their worst fear was that I’d marry a Muslim girl.” He’s even tried to bring his mother to *shul*. “She would love it,” he says.

Michael is grateful to the people who have helped him along the way, whether through their writings or their relationships with him.

Michael says that in the beginning he was angry, and it often came through in the way he spoke. “But I don’t want to be seen as a provocateur or transfer hate from one group to another. I want to change people’s minds. Rabbi Singer softened my edges a little. I still use strong language, but I’ve toned it down. Rabbi Singer’s words mean a lot to me. I try to keep them in mind because I don’t want to disappoint G-d.”

AN ETERNAL PEOPLE

Michael points to the Rambam’s *Epistle to Yemen*, written to a besieged Jewish community facing persecution and false messianic claims. “You are an eternal and indestructible nation. The reason you still exist is a testament to the fact that you are a miracle of G-d. Dig into your roots,” he says. “Remember Abraham smashing the idols. Remember David and Goliath. Remember Moses at the Red Sea. There’s a lot of emphasis on suffering and not enough emphasis on strength. You need strength because this is a war. We have to win and they have to lose.”

His message to the wider world is simpler. “Throughout history, every country that mistreated Jews eventually suffered immensely. It’s a recurring theme. Ask yourself, ‘Which side am I on?’” ●