

When I met with Jews

By T. Hamid

“Oh my G-d...I am now sitting with a Jew...face to face...in my house...having a meal together...is this a dream!”.....these were the words that came to my mind when I met socially with a Jewish person when we sat together at the same table.

Let me now tell you the story from the start.

As I explained in a previous article, I was born in Egypt and because of the extreme dehumanisation of the Jews everywhere around me I used to think they looked green in colour when I was at the age of 4-5.

Later on, for some personal reasons, I had a feeling that I wanted to meet with them, talk to them, and to try and understand their feelings.

This was virtually impossible for me as my country was at war with Israel, and even when it signed a peace agreement with Israel it, was just words on a piece of paper. Just to think of trying to talk to the Jews could be considered a crime that could get you in trouble.

The first time I had an opportunity to meet with a Jewish person, was when I went to Europe in the early 1980s on a student exchange program. I heard that there was a student from Israel, and I tried to talk to him but because of terrorist acts done by Arabs to Jews, I was neither surprised nor offended when he was afraid to talk to me. I excused him for this because nearly all of the Arabs who may approach him, would not have had good intentions toward him, and may be thinking actually of harming him.

Sadly this attempt to talk to a Jew did not succeed, but my interest to talk to the Jews never ceased.

The second attempt happened when Israel was represented at the Cairo Book Fair, which was attended by nearly two million people in the month it opened. I was walking with my wife at the book fair, and I told her I felt very guilty that no Egyptian was visiting the Israeli section or showing them any hospitality. She agreed with me, and we decided to go and tell them that we are only simple people who have a message of “love” for them.

We were planning to invite them to dinner at our house just to talk to them, and to fulfil my dream to meet with Jews and to give them a measure of our love. We went in and we were the ONLY people in the whole country who did so.

At first we felt that the place was under a lot of tension, as there had been a bomb attack on it one week before our visit. People from both Egypt and Israel were looking at us and could not believe that a couple of Egyptians wanted to visit the Israeli section. We continued with big smiles, and we stood in front of the shelves to see their books.

In these moments, we felt that all the people, (it seemed to us, they were from the Egyptian and Israeli Intelligence services), were doing nothing, but looking at us with clear astonishment on their faces.

I smiled at my wife and told her it seems that no one in this place will understand our innocent motives, especially after an attempt to explode the Israeli section the previous week....and we just went out smiling again, whilst all the people inside were quite astonished !

I said to myself, it seems that it is now impossible to really meet with a Jew.

Many years passed after this, and during which I immigrated to the West.

My desire to meet with a Jew remained the same, but sadly the daily terror acts conducted by Arabs against the Jews made us feel that they will misunderstand our intentions toward them. As all we wanted to do was to give them a handful of love, a hug full of peace, and to be with them to remove some tears from their eyes.

Additionally, we expected that they would refuse our friendship, and probably deal harshly with us as a response to the daily terror and suicide bombings done by Islamic terrorists. Thus we just remained silent for years.

One day, I was watching the CNN, and it showed a documentary about terror acts in Israel.

The attack this time was against Jewish children in a kindergarten in Israel. The documentary showed a birthday party for one of them that had happened only one week before the terror attack that killed many, and left others permanently handicapped.

When I saw those children singing and playing around I could not stop my tears from flowing like a river. I said to my wife that I cannot remain silent, and I will phone these people to at least, tell them that there are others who also feel their pain.

I did not have any phone number to all, so I phoned the Telephone Information who gave me the phone number of the Israeli Information centre. What I wanted to do was to send them a small donation for the victims of terror, and I did not know how to do this, or where to send the money.

I raised the phone handle, and started to dial the number that was given to me. I was afraid to even say my name, as the Egyptian government, which had already signed a peace agreement with Israel, would still consider the greatest sin ever is to “love the Jews”.

I was planning to do my task *without* mentioning my name or anything about myself.... just by sending the money in cash in an envelope.

What I did not expect to happen was that I got an answer machine, with a message that I should leave my name, the subject, and my phone number so that they could phone me back.

I was very afraid that they might hate me, or refuse the small donation if I left my name and phone number. I imagined that they may say “we hate you bloody Arabs” and just shut the phone in my face. All of these feelings were because I could not imagine that they would even talk to an Arab after the bombing at the kindergarten.

Anyhow, I decided to leave a message, and said,” My name is Tawfik Hamid. I am Egyptian and all I want is to know is.... how I can send a small donation for the victims of terror in Israel”...I was afraid to tell them who I was and that I am an Egyptian, for the above mentioned reasons.

I thought that they would hate us as we, (I mean by ‘we’, the Arabs and Muslims, not me) hate them. Finally, I left the message and waited for a response!

But what happened was different to what any Arab would expect!

For, to my surprise a lady phoned me the next day, and left a phone message with the phone number of the Israeli Embassy, which was in another city. She said that they would assist me. And I was surprised that she did not say anything bad against me. Her message was very warm!

I then had the courage to phone the Israeli Embassy, but I was still reluctant to say that I am an Arab/Egyptian, with a Muslim background. I phoned the Embassy but I did not tell them anything about me, as all that I needed was a contact address to send this small symbolic donation.

Whilst the lady on the other end of the phone was looking up the address, she surprised me with a question...”I would love to know who you are”... I hesitated for a while and I said to her...”I am just a human being”.... then she said to me “I know that you are a human being, but I just wanted to know who is this wonderful person who is on the other end of the phone’. I said to her, look, I am an Egyptian, and this is what I want to do”.

Instead of hanging up the phone, as I expected to happen, she welcomed me with the warmest words ever. I could not believe my ears, but it was real. At that moment after talking to her, I started to know who the Jews were!
...A nation that, if you offer them your hand with love, you will have hundreds of hands offered in return. A nation that, if you gave them a flower, you will be rewarded with thousands of flowers. A nation that if you give them a hug in a moment of pains you will get millions of hugs when you are in pain.

Finally, I did my task, and I also sent to that lady a small card to support her and others in the Embassy in their war against terror. A war that had been started and conducted, sadly, by the militant fanatical Muslims supported by many, if not most, of the Arab and Muslims in the street.

I had only one message to give this lady, which was that “there are people who love them, empathise with them, and feel for their suffering”.

She responded with a wonderful e-mail to me that only made me feel that I am dealing with people who really love peace. It just confirmed my belief that all the problems in the Middle East are because the Arabs and Muslims hate the Jews just for being Jews. In other words if all the Jews in Israel became Muslims, the Arabs would be happy with them, and will accept and live with them in peace and there would be no problem of the land! So the real problem is that the Arabs do not accept the Jews to live as Jews in their land.

I learnt in my history books in Egypt when I was young; the land was either sold by Palestinians to the Jews or controlled by Israel, a response to the Arab aggression and declaring war against Israel since the very first moment of its declaration as a country.

After my wonderful communication with the lady in the Israeli Embassy I started to feel that I am really dealing with very civilised people, and that the media in my country gave the wrong picture to us.

I invited this wonderful lady for a cup of tea or coffee with us, if ever she came to the city where my wife and I live. I wanted to invite her for a meal, but I was afraid that she would be very suspicious. An Islamic group in Pakistan invited a young Jewish journalist for a meal around this time, and as expected they slaughtered him and even videotaped his suffering with obvious enjoyment!

Even though my talk with the lady in the Israeli Embassy was very fruitful, my dream to sit at a table with a Jew in order to talk and chat with them did not happen.

Around this time I met with a Jewish person by pure chance in a social gathering. His name was ‘Joe’ and I had a talk with him. I felt he was a very civilised and decent person with very sensitive feelings.

One day, I just sent him an e-mail to ask about the welfare of his daughter after a terror act by Palestinian terrorists, as she lived in Israel at that time. Even though I did not consider that what I did was anything more than a normal human to human feeling, he considered it to be a great thing. I felt happy with his response and at the same time I felt sad that Arabs and Muslims had reached a level of hating others that made a simple gesture as this, to be something great in the eyes of a Jew. In my heart I was doing what I felt was a basic obligation between humans, that they should love each other and I did not think for a moment that it should be even praised.

After this stage, I said to my wife, "why not invite him and his wifehe might accept"

And so it happened, and he immediately appreciated and accepted our invitation. So finally my dream was nearly to become true....to have meal with my Jewish friends and sit with them face to face at one table.

It was as far as I remember a Tuesday night, and all my family were waiting for this historical event, (at least it was for me and for my wife).

I still remember when my wife wanted to buy the dessert from a shop, and I told her "what if the very rare thing happened, and it was not well refrigerated and these two guys got food poisoning...I would not blame them if they thought it was intentional ". So my wife made the dessert just to avoid this possibility!

At 7p.m. "Joe' with his wonderful wife arrived with flowers in their hands.

We sat down and started talking, and after few minutes the meal was ready and my wife called to us to be seated at the table. When we sat at the table, I could not believe myself and could not imagine that my dream of sitting with a Jew at the same table had come true, and In my mind the words which started this article came to me, which were "Oh my G-d...I am now sitting with a Jew...in my house...having a meal together...face to face...is this a dream?

At the table I noticed that they were religious Jews, who had very sensitive feelings and higher moral standards than most people I had met in my life. I felt that all that I had heard about the Jews in my country and what Arabs know from their media was just a big lie. They were, in simple words, real flowers.

I will never forget the tear that appeared in his eye when we prayed together before the food, to thank our one and only creator. I wanted in this moment to hug him and hug every Jew, and ask them to forgive me for the media and religious leaders in my country that are always trying to defame them. I felt ashamed of the very big lie in which Arabs live. I wanted to tell every Arab and Muslim,. Please, do not hate Jews when you have never met with them, do not hate the Jews while you have never sat together at a table to share a meal

together.. Do not hate the Jews without hearing from them and trying to understand them.. Please ...my nation.. STOP hating the Jews.

These were the feelings in my mind while we were sipping our drinks, and eating some Mediterranean food!

After this visit I wanted to tell every Arab and Muslim about it. But sadly, many of them do not want to believe that the Jews are good. This would stop them from practicing their hatred!

Joe and his wife reciprocated our invitation in a very generous manner that just consolidated my views.

Later, another wonderful Jewish couple came to our house. We knew him, but his lady had not been in the house of an Arab, Egyptian, or Muslim before. When we sat in the lounge, both my wife and I felt that she was a bit stressed by the situation, particularly after the tragedy that happened to Daniel Pearl who was slaughtered by Islamic fundamentalists, which was still fresh in the memory of every Jew.

After a few minutes of talk she relaxed, and we had a wonderful night as well. Her name was 'Gail', and during the course of conversation she told me that she worked in the Israel Information Centre. At that moment I could not stop myself asking her... "Do you remember an Egyptian who phoned that office one day?"...She replied as if she were in a dream,"Yes,.I remember.....We wondered who is this Egyptian who had just phoned us to share with us our pains and he just disappeared" I said...."I am this man"and we were both in near shock from the coincidence of meeting in such a way.

Gail and her husband became very close friends of ours, and the more we knew them the more we loved them.

After we met with a Jewish family for the second time in our life, we became even more confident that the Jews are like flowers. But sadly the media in the Arab and Muslim world blinded us from seeing its beauty and prevented us from smelling its perfume.

You need to be near a flower to smell its perfume, and as long as the Arabs are depriving themselves from the chance of getting really near to the Jews they will never be able to smell the perfume. Sadly, the fanatical religious scholars create a real barrier that has stopped Arabs and Muslims from even trying to know the Jews.... and they manage by their preaching and teaching, to kill the word in the Ten Commandments that started with it.... I am sure many will know that I am talking about the word "LOVE".

In addition to these occasions where I met with the Jews, I also met with three Jews in my mind. These were, Daniel Pearl, the Jewish mother and her two kids in Kibbutz Nitzar, and Nava.

Let me now tell you about those meetings.

Daniel Pearl was a journalist with the Washington Post. One day some Islamic Fundamentalists invited him to have 'dinner' with them, so that he could write an article about their views. The *innocent* Daniel thought he was dealing with normal human beings, and he told them he was a Jew. Sadly, this was the end of his story as the Islamic Fundamentalists killed him in the most horrible manner. They beheaded him with a knife, and enjoyed videotaping it and put the video on the Internet to show, as they imagine, the victory of Islam!!!!

Instead of the Muslims going in their millions to express their disgust from this act, they just kept silent; Many of them actually justify what happened to Daniel. The last word Daniel said was, "Yes, I am a Jew"...I felt for Daniel, as I never felt for any one before and I could not stop my hands from writing:

".....I swear that I will never ever let your name be erased from the memory of History...And I will write your name with my tears ...and I will carve it with my hands in the tops of the Mountains, so that everybody remembers you...They did not only kill you O Daniel...but they killed the meaning of life, the meaning of love, and the dreams of the following generations....."

I swear by your cries when they slaughtered you.... and I swear with the tears of your unborn child, (his wife was pregnant when the terrorists killed him, and I imagined the embryo shedding tears for the loss of a father). ...that I will never ever forget you Daniel, If they have killed you because you are a Jew then ... I am a Jew from now on.....your blood is my blood.... your soul is my soul...O Daniel...Do not forget that I am also a human being like you, as I feel for others, irrespective of religion"

Sadly Daniel died, but a new spirit was born in me.

Later on, a Palestinian terrorist killed a mother with her two children while they were in their bedroom. This was in a place called Kibbutz Netzer in Israel. I imagined what had happened in this sad night to this Jewish mother and her children, and I tried to express it as follows:

"In a small house in Kibbutz Netzer a young Jewish mother was baking a cake for her children. She promised themshe will tell them a lovely story before going to bed. They laughed and said..."We want the story of the dog and the cat...Mom"

They had had their dinner,. and they went into their lovely room...a room full of kids' toys...a room full of wonderful dreamsa room full of a shiny future for

humanity... The kids said: tell us Mom the lovely story..."the story of the dog and the cat"

Mom said..."the dog ran behind the cat" and they giggled loudly, then he took her biscuits and ran off". The kids' giggles got louder...." And the dog moved his ears to the cat" and the kids' giggling got even louder.. "Mom...Mom tell us the story again" said the kids. And Mom repeated the story...and the giggling got even louder.

And all of a sudden.while the kids were still giggling, a satanic creature (the terrorist)a snake wearing the clothes of Islam...a snake with no mercy.....a snake that kills any hope for the future.....a snake that does not understand any meaning of life..... Entered.

The mother jumped in fear and cried "take me and leave my kids free". " Kill me after I finish the story"....and the hissing of the snake was louder. "I am going kill all of you.....I am killing the dreams of the kids.....I am killing the dreams of humanity....I am killing the meaning of a human soul"...said the snake (the terrorist)

The snake took out his killing tools....and the kids' crying got louder. "The snake killed Mom"and the kids' crying got louder. But the snake had no mercy.....fear covered the kids' faces.....and the brothers hugged each other in a final goodbyein a moment of fearful terrorism.....In a moment when the meaning of humanity was killedthe eyes of the two kids met in their final look. And the rosy dream of the story had died.....and the story was never ended.....and the dog never ran again behind the cat.....And the dream of humanity had died"

I called these words "And the laughter had stopped"

The third meeting that happened in my mind, happened with the spirit of Nava. Nava was a Jewish girl around the age of 20. It was her wedding night when she died in a terror attack. She was with her father who took her to buy things for her wedding party. Sadly, both Nava and her father died in Jerusalem. The city of peace and love that has changed to a city of violence and killing by the hands of Islamic Militants and their supporters.

I imagined the blood of Nava as water that will give life to many trees which will write the story of Nava. I wished that I could write my poem with my tears to share with those who love her, the pain of her death. Here is what I wrote to Nava:

"The whole earth will not forget your smile
The whole earth will not forget your laughter...
It will not forget the moments of fear in your face....

It will not forget the drops of tears in your eyes....
It will not forget.....it will not forgetit will not forget.

For your spirit I am writing this O Nava
O the spirit of love killed for no sin
O the flower without spikes.....
A lot of hearts are calling you.....
Where have you gone....O Nava

I wish that my blood was your blood to bleed with you,
I wish that my eyes were your eyes to shed tears together,
I wish that my wounds were your wounds to share with you your pains
I wishI wish.....I wish.....

Your blood will be the ink of my pen to write about your story
The drops of your tears will be a fiery fuel in my heart
And I will swear with your name forever
O, the flower without spikes.

I will never ever forget you
I will never ever forget the drops of your dew
(I imagined her as a flower and the drops of her tears are her dew)
I will never ever forget your shed blood and the drops of your tears over your
face.
I will never ever forget your groaningO Nava

You will live in every heart that beats with love
You will become a sweet word in every tongue that speaks the truth
You will be a smile in my face
And you will become a loud cry in my chest
A great cry of the truth
A cry that will never cease
Never....never....O Nava

Your blood, O Nava on the lands of Jerusalem.....
Will be a water of life for many trees.....
Trees that will ever speak about you.....
Trees that will write the story of your tragedy in your wedding day.....
Trees that will write your story with your shed blood.....
Trees that will write poems with your tears...
Trees that will write.....The story of death of a flower without spikes.

I called this story "And the trees will start writing".

This is what I felt and I still feel.

In this context, I would like to confirm to all Arabs and Muslims who read this story that, I also feel for an old Palestinian lady who suffers in the middle of the war against terror. All that I say is, the suffering of an old lady is due to the Islamic terrorists who left Israel with no option but to strike back at them to defend its own existence. It is not because of Israel.

In other words, if the Palestinian Islamic Groups such as Hamas did not commit these dreadful crimes against innocent Jews, that old lady would not have suffered. So before blaming the Jews for her suffering, blame those who are blinded by their hatred toward the Jews, and who started to kill Israeli civilians.

As a word of truth, Israel NEVER intends to kill civilians, and what is happening is that they attack the militants in order to defend themselves. Sadly Palestinian civilians are caught in the middle.

Finally, the last meeting I would like to tell about is this story. "When I visited the Synagogue".

After I had met with many Jews, we became more than just friends and after I realized how wonderful they are, I decided to ask them if I could visit the Synagogue one day.

I was ready to accept a polite refusal as Muslims would do with people of other religions who want to attend a prayer with them in the Mosque. To my surprise, they all said to me, 'you are more than welcome".

The synagogue was for the orthodox Jews who were portrayed in the Arab media as bloodsuckers.

Anyhow, I went with my wife and had the most wonderful experience, which is to visit a Synagogue of orthodox Jews and pray to G-d with them.

Even though my Jewish friends were like flowers, I will not hide the fact that I was a bit stressed by the situation, as I did not expect we would be welcomed by everybody else. I said to my wife "look my dear wife....do not get upset if some show you a lack of hospitality or a feeling of hatred...and remember, that the blood of their children who died as a result of the terrorism of our people has still not dried yet".

The most unexpected happened and we were welcomed by everybody with a sweet smile. I could not believe it, because if I were in their shoes, I would find it

difficult to welcome an Arab, Egyptian, with an Islamic background whilst the Jews are being killed everywhere by Islamic terrorists.

The impact of this welcome was tremendous on both my wife and I.

And the prayer started.....and after a short time ,they brought the torah scrolls in front of usthe Torah that was mentioned in the Quran as:

“5:44 It was We who revealed the Torah (to Moses): therein was guidance and light.”.....I could not believe my eyes when I was witnessing a history of nearly 5000 years.....the Hebrew Hymns were sung every where around meand when it came to the final one (the hymn of Glory) my whole face was nearly covered by my tears while I followed its words as follows:

“I will chant sweet hymns and compose songs, for my soul yearns for You

My soul desires the shelter of your hand, to know all Your secret mysteries

As I speak of Your glory, my heart craves for your love.

Therefore I will speak glorious things about You, and honor Your name with songs of love.

I declare Your glory, though I have not seen You; I portray You by imagery. though I have not known You

Through the acts of Your prophets, by the speech of Your servants, You gave a glimpse of the glory of Your majestic splendor

They described Your greatness and Your power from the display of Your mighty works

They imagined You, but not as You really are, they likened You in accordance with your deeds.....”

In those moments, my tears were flowing like a river and I could not stop them...I wished that they make a real river of love in which everybody swims....I wished in these moments to tell all Muslims come with me to see why the Quran said that the Jews are Guiding Lights for humanity “:

Quran:{32.23} And certainly We gave the Book to Moses, so be not in doubt concerning the receiving of it, and We made it a guide for the children of Israel.

[32.24] And We made them Guiding Lights and leaders to guide by Our command as they were patient, and they were certain of Our communications.

and why G-d had chosen these people to carry a message for humanity that is "God is One" :

Quran: {44: 32} And We (represents God) have chosen them (the Children of Israel) above the '*Alamîn* (mankind, and jinni) and our choice was based on a deep knowledge.

I did not want the Hymn of Glory to have an end...but it had, and the Prayer to the one and only God of the universe ended in harmony.

What I want to tell all Muslims here is that, even though the Jews have suffered from terrorism, I have not heard a single word of hate to Arabs or Muslims preached in the Synagogue. They do not spend their prayer to honor any human being but to honor and praise God and ONLY God, and they do not use their prayers to curse people of other religions (as some do). They simply want to teach others that "*God is one*" through the practice of very high moral standards.

And now.....to all Muslims in the world I sayI swear by the name of God that if you really give your hand with love, peace, and flowers to the Jews, you get it back with more love, more peace, and more flowers.

These people (The Jews) are a real gift for humanity as the Quran has said. (See the above verses). So please give them a trial of love, and never let the evil religious leaders who only teach you how to hate, control your life.

Do not let them succeed in promoting hatred...just try, at least for once...just try....and I assure you that you will never regret it, and we can all make the world a better place to live in.

Just try to remove the drops of tears from the eyes of a Jewish child who lost his Mom in a terrorist attack, just try to behave in a *Godly manner* at least for once...please give it a trial.

Let us unite with the Jews to worship the one and only God....let us put our hands with them to fight poverty and disease....let us.....love the Jews and start a new era of love.

T.

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