

A Saudi Denounces “Obsessive Jew Hatred”; Allah Commanded Us To Love And Respect Jews

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The website Memri.org is so full of disturbing news from the Arab and Muslim world – newspaper articles, mosque sermons, academic lectures, media appearances, book excerpts – that we come to expect the worst, and the worst is what we ordinarily get. Recently at the site, for example, Mahmoud Abbas could be seen defending his “pay for slay” program – generous stipends for terrorists and their families – insisting he would never end it, no matter what financial pressures he endured. Elsewhere on the site, a Jordanian writer explains how the Israelis have fully implemented the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” An Egyptian “scholar” engages in Holocaust denial, while another Arab “scholar” insists that yes, some Jews were killed, but nothing like the six million victims the Zionists

claim. This television personality insists that the Zionists worked hand-in-glove with the Nazis. An Iranian leader promises the complete destruction of the Jewish state. Another Iranian announces that his people “will be proud to be killed by Zionists.” Several Muslim journalists insist that ISIS was begun, and is still run, by Israel. Others claim that Jews are behind the world-wide epidemic of “Islamophobia.” And so it goes, each claim crazier than the next.

So when, every so often, there is something good to report that has been posted at MEMRI.org, the work of a journalist or historian from the Arab world who does not make wild charges, who soberly takes issue with the demonization of the Jews that is so prevalent in the Arab and Iranian media, we ought to publicize that person, in the hope that others may emulate his example. That doesn't mean he has freed himself entirely from conventional Arab criticism of the “Zionist political project.” But his sympathetic view of Jews, shown in his emphasizing the positive aspects of Muslim-Jewish relations in early Islam, should not be ignored.

In his March 3, 2019 column in the leading London-based Saudi daily *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Saudi journalist and businessman Hussein Shobakshi made some observations [about the obsessive hatred](#) of Jews found so often in the Arab and Muslim world.

“When the extremists in the political Islam organizations want to carry out character assassination against a leader in the Arab world, they are accustomed to reiterating over and over that ‘his mother was a Jewess’ or that ‘he has Jewish roots.’ [this has been said about El-Sisi by the Muslim Brotherhood]. Often, the supporters of this or that leader [e.g. El-Sisi] respond to this by saying of the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood that ‘his mother was a Jewess.’ This has made me wonder about the scope of the hatred for Jews in our culture, and about our inability to distinguish between the Jews as People of the Book – whom Allah commanded us to love and respect and permitted us to trade with them, eat their

foods, and marry them – and the Israeli Zionist political project that has instilled [in us] schizophrenia [in our attitude towards the Jews] from which we have not yet awakened.

“The intensity of the Jew-hatred disseminated by the media and by art, literature, and political cartoons [in the Arab world] has reached a degree that cannot be ignored. No one, of course, is arguing that the Jewish and Israeli arena itself is free of a culture of hatred within it. [He cannot yet free himself from all the calumnies about Israel] In the extremist religious Jewish schools, there is [also] the same takfir [i.e. accusing others of heresy, as there is among Muslims] and differentiation between the [Jewish] people and the ‘gentiles,’ who are worthless and may be robbed and killed. From these schools emerged the well-known extremist terrorists Meir Kahana and Baruch Goldstein.

“However, antisemitism in the Arab world is the product of loathsome, racist education that is rooted in the Arab mentality that is used to labeling people according to tribal, family, and racial affiliation, and according to the religious school to which they belong. It is this education that prompted thousands of Jews who were citizens of Arab countries to emigrate after the establishment of the State of Israel... (this is the same mentality faced by Christians of the Arab Orient and by all other religious [non-Muslim] streams in the region).

He recognizes that antisemitism is part of the Arab mentality, but he does not mention – how could he? – that the Qur’an itself is the main source of Arab antisemitism. Instead he refers to a “loathsome, racist education that is rooted in the Arab mentality,” a mentality that keeps labelling people according to “tribal,, family, and racial affiliation.” This “mentality” led Jews to emigrate after Israel was established. That is an oblique reference to the pogroms all over the Arab

world, prompted by the rage over the Naqba, the catastrophe of the loss to the despised Jews in the 1948-49 war.

“The Prophet Muhammad married a Jewess, arrived at a peaceful coexistence agreement with the Jews of Madina, mortgaged his shield to his Jewish neighbor, and stood at the funeral of a Jew, and the Quran says of People of the Book that they are not all like each other [i.e. that there are respectable people among them]. [However], we disregard all these very positive references [to Jews] and present invented theories, interpretations, and motives that justify Jew-hatred, and, based on this, we have formulated views rife with suspicion regarding them and fear of them stemming, in truth, from hatred...

To support his claim that Jews today deserve better treatment from Muslims, he reminds Muslims of their relations to Jews during early Islam. Muhammad “married a Jewess, arrived at a peaceful coexistence agreement with the Jews of Madina, mortgaged his shield to his Jewish neighbors (a sign of trust).” Hussein Shobakshi is trying to put his own spin on those events. He mentions Muhammad’s marriage to Saafiya, a Jewess, but does not tell us about his raid on the Jews of Khaybar, or the killing of her father and husband by the Muslims. He mentions the agreement with the Jews of Madina, but not the killing of the Banu Qurayza (one of the Jewish tribes of Madina) by the Muslims. He is putting a slant on the past to encourage Muslims to change their view of Jews, an objective some may believe sufficiently worthy to justify the scanting of history it requires.

“It is inconceivable that [you, a Muslim] should argue that your religion commands you to respect the People of the Book and yet not implement this in practical, concrete terms. But the [real] challenge [that you face is answering the questions]: Can peace with the other be possible without first actualizing this peace with yourself and with those around

you? And do we have a problem of hatred and racism towards Jews? An honest, credible answer to these questions is necessary, and they may be the first in a series of embarrassing questions that we have for many years been avoiding dealing with and answering.”

Here Shobakshi widens his argument to include Christians—Islam “commands you to respect the People of the Book.” He suggests that Muslims ask themselves if they can truly be at “peace with ‘the other’ [Jews and Christians] without first “actualizing this peace” with themselves. Then he calls for Muslims to recognize their intolerable “hatred and racism toward Jews.” It’s a tall order. But at least he has raised the issue of the obsessive antisemitism of the Arabs, has declared it unacceptable, and has suggested ways to fight it, by reporting on what he believes is evidence of good relations between Muslims and Jews in early Islam. He has exaggerated the amicability of those relations, and has deliberately not mentioned those Qur’anic verses that are anti-Jewish, but he has done so in a good cause. If thereby he manages to persuade some Muslims to reject their obsessive anti-Jewishness, that would be worth the slight offense to history..And if he manages to do even more, that is to convince Muslims not just to jettison their antisemitism but to look positively on Jews, and possibly even on Israelis, that would be worth whatever further slight to history might be required.

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