



# Tea with Hezbollah

TED DEKKER AND CARL MEDEARIS

SO, WHAT IS IT LIKE TO LOVE AN ENEMY? What are our so-called enemies really like, one on one? What are their favorite movies? When was the last time they cried? What is their favorite joke? If we could only take *People* magazine-like snapshots of the very people who make many in the United States cringe.

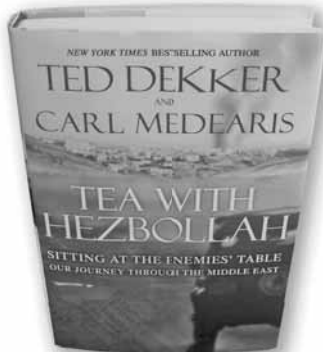
And what do our “enemies,” being deeply religious people, think of this great teaching to love your neighbor, even if that neighbor is your enemy? It’s no secret that Muslims believe that even though Muhammad is the last prophet, Jesus is also greatly revered, having lived a perfect life, and destined to return one day and claim his own. What do they think of the parable of the Good Samaritan? Do they follow its lesson as poorly as most American Christians?

The events and people of the Middle East are inarguably crucial to every human being’s future, whether or not they recognize that fact. Our presidents are elected and rejected in part because of what occurs in this misunderstood land so far away. Mothers will lose their sons, and daughters will lose their fathers, as ideas and convictions clash in the desert. Countries will stand and fall. It’s an important place and its people are even more important. Are they our enemies? And if so, should we love them?

Surrounded by the aroma of food in the safety of a Hard Rock Cafe, Carl and I toasted the ideal travelogue. Assuming it could come together, of course. Little did we know what trouble we were inviting.

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*Excerpted by permission from Tea With Hezbollah (Doubleday, 2010).*



First, what this book is not: This is not a religious book that seeks to correct anyone’s misguided beliefs, Christian or Muslim. This is not a political book that undermines any one ideology. And it certainly is not a historical narrative that pretends to revise any previous work by far more qualified historians.

Rather, this is a travelogue, albeit one with some fairly major twists.

In the pages that follow we will trace our journey of discovery through the heart of the Middle East with some simple questions for some unique and influential personalities whom most in the United States, including the government, think of as enemies who belong on Most Wanted lists.

We will ask ourselves whether anyone is interested in loving his neighbor. Whether, for that matter, it’s even possible to follow this scandalous teaching.

## **Excerpt from transcript #1 (Hussein Shobokshi)**

*Ted: Could you introduce yourself?*

**Shobokshi:** I am Hussein Shobokshi. I went to high school in California and went to university in Tulsa. Then I did my training in New York at a bank. I loved the States. I played football in high school and

did some theater in college and played tennis. I still have friends. Now I'm heading a TV show. I also lecture and write various things on Saudi relations, the West, and Islam.

*Ted: What would you say is the greatest misunderstanding Americans have of Arabs?*

**Shobokshi:** Americans think the religion of Islam is an odd religion. But Islam is a continuous religion of Judaism and Christianity. We have the same ethics. Americans think Arabs are criminals, not trustworthy, back stabbers. It is, as you say, the flavor of the month.

*Ted: And Arabs' greatest misunderstanding of Americans?*

**Shobokstil:** Immoral, no ethics, no high standards, not conservative. Saudis who come back from California and the big cities see this immoral behavior, but the ones who visit or live in the Midwest or South of America come back with a very different conception. It depends where they go in the U.S. and their first impression.

*Ted: What makes you cry?*

**Shobokshi:** My daughter, Miriam, will be three in July and she has a very aggressive form of cancer. Her experience has been earth-shattering to me and I've never been the same. She's been through chemotherapy and operations in the United States. Her two doctors are very Jewish and her pediatrician is Irish Catholic.

## **Excerpt from transcript #2 (Sheik Muhammad Yamani):**

*Ted: Where did you study?*

**Yamani:** Cornell. I got my Ph.D. in economic geology.

*Ted: What is something that makes you laugh? Or a favorite joke perhaps.*

**Yamani:** My friend from England went to New York. He was passing in traffic and didn't see a cab that almost hit him. The taxi stopped and yelled, "What? Did you come here to die?" And my friend yelled back, "No, I came here yester-die." (*He bounces with laughter.*)

*Ted: What is something your children do that makes you laugh?*

**Yamani:** Well, you see the differences from generation to generation. I see the relation between my children and me, and my grandchildren with me. For example, when I enter my son's home, he stands up and greets me. When I enter the house and see my grandchildren, they don't stand but only say "Hi. Hi, Grandfather." When I saw my granddaughter,

she was sitting in a chair, and I wanted to sit. But she said, "We are all family, and when the chair is free, you can have it. But now it is occupied." (*Chuckles*) Now she is eleven. Her name is Fatima. TV is definitely affecting their dialogue and their actions. We have to be careful.

*Ted: Do you have any hobbies?*

**Yamani:** When I was young, I played soccer and swam. And I like to watch TV, and I like to read at night, and I write articles for the newspaper.

*Ted: When was the last time you cried?*

**Yamani:** I usually don't cry. But if I see someone suffer, like if a friend has a mother or father die and I see him suffering, I feel very sad. One year ago, my friend's father was crossing a street and was hit by a car and died. The saddest day was when I lost my mother, because she was so kind to me and to others. She taught me to be kind to others. And also the death of my father ten years later.

*Ted: What is the common Saudi's greatest misconception of Americans?*

**Yamani:** They look at America as cowboys who all want war. But your information is not correct about the Arab world. I think we have to put more effort in the children, because they are the future. If the American people came to the Arab world and discover the culture, they would love the Arabs. Like when I went to the U.S., I liked the people. People need to see the good in the others. Secondly, the religion has been distorted. In both America and the Arab world. All people should love each other. Let us go and teach people that there is beautiful God. Politics do not help anything. Why not talk about culture and people? Not politics. I think your book will help.

*Ted: What frustrates you among your people?*

**Yamani:** When I discover that anyone has lied to me. Lying really affects me. I'd rather hear the truth.

*Ted: When asked what his most important teaching was, Jesus answered that it was to love the Lord your God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. What does this mean in relation to loving one another?*

**Yamani:** I don't think this is the word of Jesus. It is the word of God. The same word was sent to Muhammad. It is the same teaching. The Qur'an orders us to respect Jesus and his mother, who is a noble lady. To be a Muslim, you must believe this. But people must see the good in one another in order to love each other; otherwise they cannot love each other. First you must understand each other.

**Excerpt from transcript #3  
(Hezbollah fighter):**

*Ted: Can you tell us about yourself? What you do?*

**Hezbollah fighter:** Yes. I am now forty-three years old. I have a wife and two children, ages twenty and nineteen. I am a business administrator and this is how I earn my living.

*Ted: How long have you been with the Hezbollah?*

**Hezbollah fighter:** For a very long time. Since the first invasion.

*Ted: What do you do for Hezbollah?*

**Hezbollah fighter:** I do what is required to help the people. I sometimes speak for the organization. Everything. Most of the time I do my normal business, but when war comes, then I will fight.

*Ted: So ... you've fought in these wars recently? You pick up a gun and fight?*

**Hezbollah fighter:** Of course. But I only use a gun when it is required to defend my homeland. I am a peaceful man most of the time, but then I will pick up a gun to defend my home and children.

*Ted: Have you ever killed someone?*

**Hezbollah fighter:** Yes.

*Ted: When was the last time you cried?*

**Hezbollah fighter:** A week ago, when I went on TV and said that whoever shoots at us [in Lebanon], we would shoot back. And this is the toughest decision I have ever made. This is what made me cry. Nasrallah knows that my decision was very tough because he knows that we will now be seen as evil persons with weapons.

**Excerpt from Transcript #4  
(Sheik Nabil Qaouk, the #2 leader in  
Hezbollah)**

**Ted:** Thank you for your time, sheik.

**Sheik Nabil:** Today is the busiest day, but when I heard about your purpose, I set everything aside to give you the whole day because I believe this type of dialogue is worshiping and pleasing God. This is a way to peace. We think that the three religions complement each other. We have to believe what Abraham, Moses, and Jesus taught as Muslims. We believe that Jesus and the nephew of Muhammad will come and unite all humanity. And all people will come together and pray one prayer.

*Ted: I would like to ask you some questions that will help us know you a little better. Is that okay?*

**Sheik Nabil:** Please.

*Ted: What kind of car do you drive?*

**Sheik Nabil:** (Chuckles) A Mercedes.

*Ted: What color?*

**Sheik Nabil:** Black. But you won't see my car from the sky, because I park under tarps. Many times I have nearly been killed by assassins and bombs targeting me.

*Ted: Where do you live?*

**Sheik Nabil:** I move many times so that my enemies can't find me. This isn't appropriate to discuss, you understand?

*Ted: Of course. And your family?*

**Sheik Nabil:** I have a wife and four children. My son Mokdadi is preparing an educational movie about children. I have a daughter who is in college in Iran. My third child, Abass, is nine years old and loves karate and soccer. He is also in Iran. And my youngest daughter is three.

*Ted: When was the last time you cried?*

**Sheik Nabil:** Every time I pray to God I cry. Recently I cried when I heard that a husband was killed with a cluster bomb. Now his wife and children are suffering. I met with them and showed them sympathy. The youngest child was crying. He was only three years old. He cried so much that everyone started crying with him. The thing that makes me cry the most is when I see children crying and suffering.

*Ted: Jesus' greatest teaching was that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. How do you recommend we love each other as he taught?*

**Sheik Nabil:** Love has many stages. The highest level is when you cannot decide whether to love or not to love because there is no room for hatred. The love of your neighbors comes naturally in response to obeying Jesus and God. Loving the neighbor is proof that your heart is full of love. When we say neighbors, we mean all of humanity. All people are brothers because we all come from God.

If you believe in one God, you become equal with all Muslims. We believe there are many ways to God but there is one God. Praying is one way. Helping people is another way. Pleasing the heart of a sad person is a way to God. Serving people is a way. Only God can know what is in our hearts. It's not that you pray more, you become better. Some things might be more important than prayer. You cannot do things for yourselves or for show. You have to act from your faith. I know many Christians who are devoted to service and are very good people. We respect and love those people. f