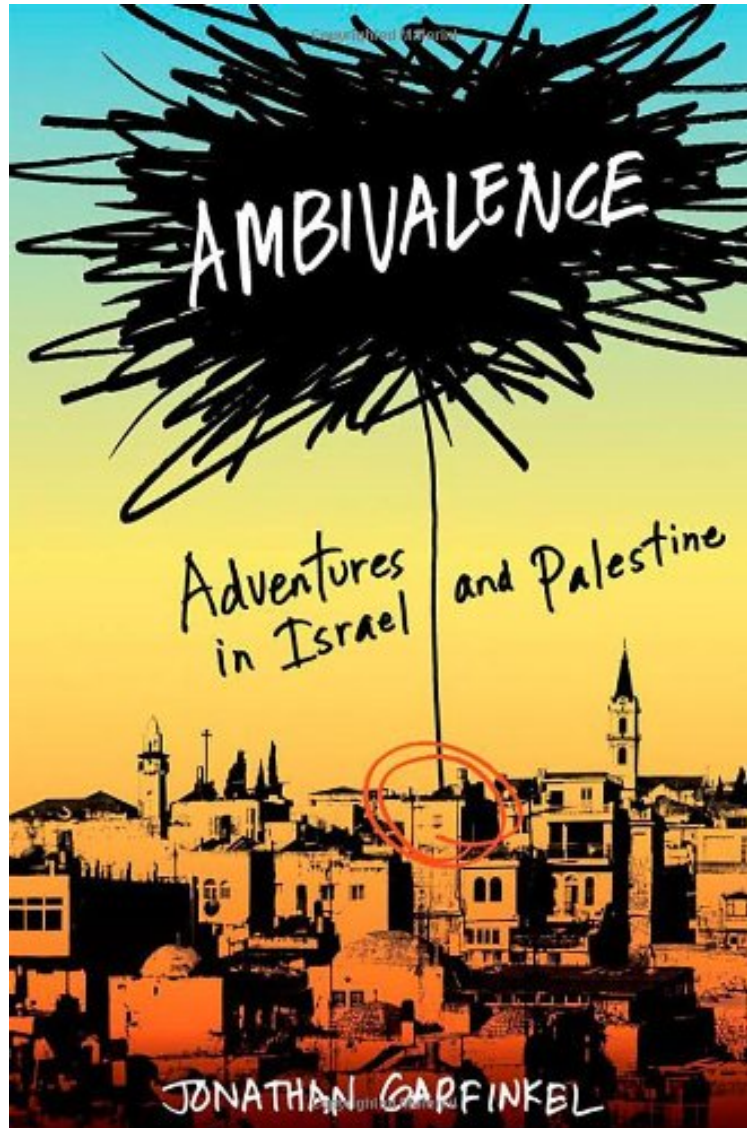


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Ambivalence: Adventures in Israel and Palestine

Jonathan Garfinkel

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Jonathan Garfinkel : Ambivalence: Adventures in Israel and Palestine before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ambivalence: Adventures in Israel and Palestine:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Well written, a fast read, personal, and involves unique stories.By Christopher M. Whitman Jr.Jonathan Garfinkel does a good job spelling out in detail his personal journey from a traditional Jew in Toronto to traveling over all parts of Palestine. He has animated and human stories about sadness, depression, and hope. He does not try and gloss over stories, nor does he try and over hype them. He had a clear vision

when he wrote this book and he succeeded in giving any reader of the book the feeling of having been involved with his life. He has inner conflicts through the book that make you think, and speaks very honestly. Cannot be more straight forward with that. If you have ever been here, in Palestine, or are involved in the conflict in anyway, it is a worthwhile read. It helps if you have this background, or better a knowledge of Hebrew, to understand some of the terms he uses. Good job!

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. overcoming brainwashing
By J. ABDO
He may be ambivalent about his faith and he may have been ambivalent about his girlfriend before he got dumped, but about Israel I'm not so sure. He's definitely proud of himself for making a Palestinian friend and for eventually asking and answering questions most Jews manage to suppress and ignore- even the ones living in Israel. He finds out his view of history learned at his Canadian Zionist school was a lie (propaganda, indoctrination, IMO). He's haunted continually by this composite character representing the school like a true victim of serious semi-successful brainwashing. He's got several composite characters and dead people or those not in the country speaking to him. It was creative and kind of fun, but in a memoir, I'm not sure I liked it. He does have some breakthroughs. There were in fact people on the land (Israel) before them (Israeli Jews) and Palestinians didn't leave of their own free will and did in fact want to come back. Also, he learns that not everyone hates Jews and there is such thing as Palestinians and the map of Israel he had burned in his brain as a child was wrong. I think he still holds onto the lie that it was the Jews who made the desert bloom, though. What is shocking is how I hear people constantly bemoan the fact that Palestinians are being indoctrinated to hate Jews in textbooks and schools, while there is nothing about this propaganda Jews learn in school, not just in Israel, but all over the world (and the fact that for Palestinians it is illegal to learn about their own history or literature, etc). Interestingly, at Jonathan's home synagogue, the men and women are separate and the women can't touch the Torah and men and women can't touch each other. I found it kind of funny given the fact that there has been so much press lately about mosques and how people believe Islam is the problem, after all, look how they treat women- separate to pray. Callers to radio shows justify their ill feelings for the mosque in NY due to this separation which doubtless many Jews in NY (and all over the world) also practice! When he talks to other Jews about his questioning of what he's been taught, he seems to oppose them, but does so as though he tossed a coin and he doesn't know why he's saying what he's saying. When he talks about his orthodox friends, he longs for the faith they have and admires them greatly, which is not so bad. What they say about Palestinians bothers him (also good), but not in the way Rana's acceptance of suicide bombing does- he's ready to end that friendship. The fact that his friend, Rana, supports suicide bombing as a general concept shocks him. Funny when you think of his heroes in Israeli history who were responsible for some pretty horrible things, but such is the contradiction that is Israel. When he finds out about this, he wonders why he can question his faith and position, but she can't. He also says at some point that they both have had to question their Israeli educations and she found it almost as hard as he did to criticize and question her education and (for her) Israeliness. I wonder if he thinks the Jews could have won their state with non-violence. Does he regret that they used violence so that he can freely (and cheaply if he'd taken one of Israel's many offers to Jews) travel at the expense of so many lives long gone and so many under occupation? He visits a community, Oasis of Peace, where Israelis and Palestinians live together equally, but he calls this fabricated peace rather than a choice or an alternative, as they consider it. He goes with an activist whose group is intent on posting signs telling of the state's real history, or at least a sanitized version letting people know of the Palestinian villages that Israel tried to erase. He's not terribly critical of them, but it is clear that while he seems glad he knows the truth, he doesn't really want to get involved in educating others and seems on the fence about the whole thing- he may not be as happy to know the truth as I thought. The real peace, is the one in the Shimon-Abu Dalo residence, he thinks. I disagree. They hate each other, but they don't kill each other. It's the reason for his trip to Israel. He wants to write a play about it and goes to do research and to find out about the nagging questions relating to what he learned in school. He inexplicably goes to see Divine Intervention at the Toronto Film Festival, meets Rana who tells him about this house. I hope he made a great play because I don't think his trip was too enlightening for him otherwise. When Palestinians would talk history with him, he wouldn't be able to concentrate either because the IDF was shooting or low blood sugar or whatever. He did seem to conclude that his Zionist education was a bit biased and maybe not factually correct. But he wants it to be. He wants the faith of those people and to not ask questions. He admires his "War of Independence" heroes (maybe just remembering as a child?) and how kibbutzim were instrumental in the war. He can't let go of the Jewish state idea, which precludes equality and democracy, even though he kind of understands that implication. He does less analysis and more general reporting of Israeli attitudes than some memoirs. One such experience that sticks out is how in his visit to the kibbutz, I and apparently he, expected pretty liberal attitudes about Palestinians and was surprised. He asked them if they would let Palestinians live in the kibbutz, given their values and claims of interacting with Palestinians. They weren't forthcoming. When they bragged about going to the West Bank, it was not really in a Palestinian village as they had said and it was owned by Palestinians serving Jewish patrons. I've been able to get my hands on far more Jewish memoirs than Palestinian ones. This one was pretty good. It didn't make me nearly as mad as Prisoners by Jeffery Goldberg; I was mildly disappointed. He was able to reverse some Zionist brainwashing and begin thinking for himself. He was ashamed of himself for doing this, though, and seemed to want to want the faith of people who thought Palestinians were dogs. He made some Palestinian friends and asked some questions, but he still

seems to think they are guilty or responsible for the mess they are in. He does seem to be for cooperation and peace and not so obsessed with the Holocaust (like American Jews) and manufactured victimhood that it causes moral blindness. Maybe we'll have to wait for Israel to allow Palestinians freedom of movement and to study their history and write about it without it being illegal for Palestinian memoirs to become more widely available. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Charming and meaningful By Natania Rosenfeld This book surprised me. It started out seeming flippant and too-too clever, positively Woody Allenish. Then I understood there was a point to this, and gradually, I became more and more absorbed by the book and the author's frankness about his confusion. I share and relate to his confusion and appreciate his articulacy in laying it out. While this is no intellectually or politically profound intervention, it is deep in its way, well written, humane, and full of information most of us ambivalent Zionists would not ordinarily come across without also being put off by an author's militancy. Bravo Garfinkel!

With lofty ideals, spectacular ambivalence, and endearing naiveté, Jonathan Garfinkel explores Israel and Palestine by talking to ordinary people. Jonathan Garfinkel can't make up his mind about his girlfriend, or Judaism, or Israel. After hearing about a house in Jerusalem where Jews and Arabs coexist in peace, he decides it's time to venture there. In Israel, nothing is as he imagined it, and nothing is as he was taught. Garfinkel gives us the people behind the headlines: from secret assignments with Palestinian activists and an uninvited visit at an Arab refugee camp to Passover with Orthodox Jewish friends and finding the truth about the mythic coexistence house, *Ambivalence* is the provocative, surreal, and often hilarious chronicle of his travels. In this part memoir and part quest, Garfinkel struggles with the growing divisions in a troubled region and with the divide in his soul. Marvelous. Garfinkel deftly mines what it means to simultaneously belong, disavow, love, and loathe an identity, a culture, and a history.... A must-read. David Rakoff

From Booklist Raised in Toronto as a Conservative Jew, Garfinkel finds more perplexity than reassurance in his inherited faith, particularly after his progressive friends turn against Israel. But hope flickers when he hears about a house in Jerusalem where Palestinian and Jew live together amicably. So he leaves Canada to investigate this miraculous home. Besides, he needs fresh material for a commissioned play. However, when Garfinkel reaches Israel, events on the ground defy his lofty expectations and frustrate his playwriting instincts. Hardly a haven of amity, the Palestinian-Jewish home the author finally locates (after great difficulty) reflects rather than transcends the tensions running through a fractured land. Exceptionally broad empathies draw the author into probing conversations with a wide range of passionate voices: Israeli and Palestinian, religious and secular, militant and pacifist. Often painful, these exchanges expose the plight of displaced Palestinians, the fears of anxious Israelis. Garfinkel offers no clear strategy for resolving the tensions. But readers may discern a glimmer of progress in the mere presence of a listening ear. -- Bryce Christensen About the Author Jonathan Garfinkel is a celebrated poet and playwright. He lives in Toronto. This is his first work of nonfiction.