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# Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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From Grove Press : Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A WELCOME SELF-EXAMINATIONBy MevashirLetter to

contributors of this book: Dear Scholars, have been reading your poignant book, *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* by Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon (Oct 13, 2003). As someone who left Israel and converted to Christianity seeking a way out of the endless cycle of hatred and violence that characterizes life there, I also have wrestled with Tziyon. But to my shock I have discovered that much of the impetus for aggressive Zionism came from evangelical Christians in the UK and US, as described in this book: *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* by Victoria Clark (Nov 28, 2007). I have attached a study that tries to put Zionism into a larger theological and historical perspective. I think it might help you deal with the ugly aspects of Zionism that aggrieve many of us by explaining their roots in Christianity and Western Imperialism. I also was very moved by Judith Butler's essay about President Summers of Harvard attempting to indict all who critique Israel as anti-Semites. Having attended Harvard many years ago, and whose father is a Harvard professor, I can attest that their arrogance and domineering nature is breathtaking. I would suggest that Harvard academics revise Descartes's famous I think because I am to I think because I am at Harvard. Anyway, as a former Israeli Haredi nationalist who converted to Christianity in 2000 and has renounced all association with Zionism, I too have been subjected to withering attacks. This is a letter I sent to Israeli consulates around the world following the Mavey Marmara atrocity. And this is a dialogue I had long ago with Israeli ber-Zionists who denounced me as well. So far as the accusation of "self-hating Jew" goes, I deal with it in the following way, symbolic of judo-psychology (using your attacker's own rhetoric against him). I turn it around and say that I am a selfish-hating Jew, meaning I hate Jews who attempt to use Judaism to justify their selfishness and lack of compassion. I also think that there is ample teaching within normative Judaism to counter this charge by elevating it. The practice of fasting certainly is a form of "self-hatred" that all religious Jews honor. So is the teaching in Pirkay Avot that Who is the strong man? One who conquers his desires. This also is a form of hating one's odious side. So are statements about being mosser nefesh for Torah study and charitable deeds. All these are spiritual concepts of hating oneself, or at least part of oneself. (Of course Christianity has this as a major tenet, as when Jesus said: What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but to forfeit his soul? He who forfeits his life for My sake gains it, but he who gains his life will lose it.) Unfortunately these latter examples do not lend themselves readily to sound bites; hence my first retort that I am a selfish-hating Jew. I think that is wonderfully stinging and pithy making it very effective. My only objection to your essay about Summers is that you were too apologetic. So far as the rest of the book goes, I am very grateful for this collection of thoughtful soul-searching essays. They have helped me clarify my own thinking. I had known about Judah Magnes, but did not realize that Martin Buber also expressed strong reservations about Zionistic nationalism. I thought the essay by Daniel Boyarin was very insightful. I don't know how he can love Christianity so much without wanting to be a follower of Jesus himself. But maybe he is in his own quiet way, like his name-sake Daniel Tzion! Also perhaps only those who once hated Jesus (like me) can eventually give it all up and surrender fully to Him? The essay by Arthur Waskow was very passionate, although a bit weird. I love his article: *Jesus, the Rabbis, and the Image on a Coin*. The essay by Marc Ellis has a lot of promise, but I felt his writing style was convoluted and struggled to comprehend what he really wants to say. The essay by Ammiel Alcalay was really breathtaking. When I lived in Israel most of my friends in the Breslov Chassidic movement were French Jews of Sefardic (Moroccan) extraction. Unfortunately our rabbi, Israel Odesser, was somewhat prejudiced against Sefardic Jews, which is one reason I eventually left the movement and became a follower of Yeshua MiNatzrat (figuring Him to be the ultimate Sefardic Rabbi!). I wonder if he is familiar with the internet author Eileen Fleming, who has written extensively about Mordechai Vanunu? Back in 2005, when I was living in Jerusalem, I walked over to the East Jerusalem church where Vanunu was staying and asked him to join me as a street evangelist in West Jerusalem. I suggested to him that Israel's antipathy for evangelism would overwhelm its paranoia about his nuclear knowledge and he probably would find himself expelled from the country (as he wished all along). I also assured him that I would go to jail with him if they arrested him. He demurred, thinking perhaps that I am crazy, which I might well be. That was my humble effort to help free him from his Israeli captors. (Ammiel might be interested in reading about this Israeli Sefardic woman who renounced her citizenship over injustice to Palestinians: Avigail Abarbanel. Also this Jewish American who has taken up Palestinian rights: Anna Baltzer.) I was very disappointed by Susannah Heschel's comment towards the end of the book (p. 295) that Many Palestinians are our enemy, to be sure, and wish our death and destruction - all of us, Diaspora Jews and Israelis. Only a fool would fail to recognize that. Well, Susannah, count me as one of those fools. (And furthermore, I would say if they really harbor such malice towards us then it is only because we have earned their enmity and deserve their antipathy. If we have become so woefully corrupted and devoid of essential humanity, then perhaps our collective demise would be a mitzvah?) This really seemed like a reptilian statement, especially from the daughter of a famous humanitarian rabbi. Even if there are such Palestinians, doesn't Susannah remember the scripture, Proverbs 27:19 As in water face reflects face, So a man's heart reveals the man? Or how about In the measure one measures out so it is measured back to him? So perhaps the murderous enmity of some Palestinians towards Jews is merely a reflection of our own antipathy towards them? That seems elementary to me. Or is it only the followers of Jesus who can comprehend such things? Please forward to Jonathan Boyarin this link to Ali Abunimah's book that discusses his family's upbringing in Lifta: *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse* by Ali Abunimah (Aug 21, 2007). I wonder why you did not include something from Gilad

Atzmon in your book? Or from Roy Tov, who converted to Christianity and is radically anti-Zionist. Are they too extreme for your taste? God Bless You all for your sincere and searching hearts. Shalom baShem Yeshua, Menachem Mevashir PS This might strike you as really wierd, and if it offends you then I ask your forgiveness in advance, but perhaps part of the problem of what Marc Ellis so perceptively calls "Constantinian Judaism" (although I would propose "Akivian Judaism" to reflect the brutal ultra-nationalism of the man who knowingly anointed a false Messiah and instigated a ruinous war with Rome that cost half-a-million Jewish lives; see page 5 of this link) is semantic. What I mean is that in Hebrew Zionism is Tziyonut. Zayin in Hebrew refers to weapons or to the male sex organ. It actually is a rather vulgar term. So perhaps we are victims of our own misguided semantics and mis-transliterations? Tziyon means marker, monument, or gravestone. This also has Constantinian overtones, but it also can refer to the One who escaped from the tomb and rose from the dead, Who in my opinion is the only real hope for defusing the toxic confrontation between the warring seed of Abraham. I also would propose a fusion of the Divine Name to YaHuWAlLaH, to reflect unity between Isaac and Ishmael. This reflects the true pronunciation of YHWH that Rabbi Zalman confirmed to me a number of years ago, and is parallel to the Hebrew Adonay-Elohim, or Lord God. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. zionBy basha detroit The two editors, Kushner and Solomon, are also two of our most cherished writers in the United States, working now. I trust that they both wrestled deeply inside themselves to achieve this rare and vital work. I salute them both and am personally grateful for the book, which offers insights to a history that we tend not to see. Simply, Kushner and Solomon have uncovered a rock, and allowed the creepy crawly feelings to come out and be examined. 17 of 22 people found the following review helpful. Watch out for bogus reviews By The Truth Shall Set You Free Watch out for reviews from people like Shalom Freedman. It's ironic that this reviewer summons the line "Have you no shame?" while at the same time dismissing all Jews he doesn't agree with as self-hating. Rather than counter their arguments with his own, this type of lazy reviewer seeks to circumvent intellectual discussion altogether with ugly ad hominem attacks. His hateful screeds aren't just directed at books, but at their authors as well. He leaves the same bankrupt reviews for any and every book that dares criticize Israel or Zionism. Mr. Freedman clearly has nothing better to do with his time than bash books and authors whom he has clearly not even bothered to read. Where is YOUR shame, Mr. Freedman?

As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalates, a dangerous illusion persists that the American Jewish community speaks with a single voice, expressing universal, uncritical support for the policies of the Sharon government. This appearance of unanimity does grave disservice to the heterogeneity of Jewish thought, and to the centuries-old Jewish traditions of lively dispute and rigorous, unapologetic skeptical inquiry. Wrestling with Zion brings together prominent poets, essayists, journalists, activists, academics, novelists, and playwrights, representing the diversity of opinion in the progressive Jewish-American community regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All the participants share three things: a Jewish identity, an American identity, and a sense of urgency, refusing to ignore the catastrophic injustice that has been visited upon the Palestinian people, while at the same time being passionately committed to Jewish survival and American legacies of compassion and moral courage. The contributors including Nathan Englander, Susan Sontag, Robert Pinsky, Daniel Wolfe, and many others have considered certain essential questions: What is at the heart of the connection between Israel and American Jews? What is Israel's role in shaping Jewish-American identities? How has this role changed historically? And what is the history, both familiar and forgotten, of Zionism's political, cultural, and spiritual meaning?

From Publishers Weekly With violence between Israeli Jews and Palestinians continuing and the death toll rising, playwright Kushner and journalist Solomon have compiled a book of thoughts by a progressive and diverse group of notable Jewish writers on the current situation in the Middle East and the prospects for peace. According to the contributors, the media presents an apparent unanimity of Jewish opinion on the conflict, which distorts the real diversity of the community's convictions. To give some historical perspective to the debate, the book begins with the writings of such figures as Ahad Ha'am, Martin Buber and Hannah Arendt; contemporary contributors include Arthur Waskow, Ellen Willis, Susan Sontag, and lesser-known writers. The essays address such issues as how and why American Jews are connected to the land of their ancestors, and how Zionism has influenced Jewish identity. Rather than distancing themselves from controversy, the editors have encouraged contributors to examine the covenant that links the Jewish people and Israel and to let it be "loosened and strengthened, de-mythified, de-fetishized, considered as a dynamic problematic, as is only appropriate to the consideration of a living bond." Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist For left-wing "or progressive" American Jews, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to present a wrenching predicament. Many are almost genetically sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, viewing Palestinians as oppressed, even colonized, victims. Yet their sustaining identity as Jews will not allow them to abandon Israel, or even Zionism, entirely. Kushner and Solomon have assembled a wide variety of journalists, scholars, and activists who consider the dilemmas and even suggest possible solutions. Some of these articles are thoughtful, provocative, and certainly worthy of further consideration. Some are filled with pointless guilt-mongering and lead nowhere. If there is a common theme here, it is that, given compassionate and reasonable Israeli policies, a

comparable Palestinian response will be forthcoming. This is an interesting, useful compilation that offers an alternative to the seemingly unanimous support the Sharon government receives from many "mainstream" Jewish writers. Jay Freeman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved