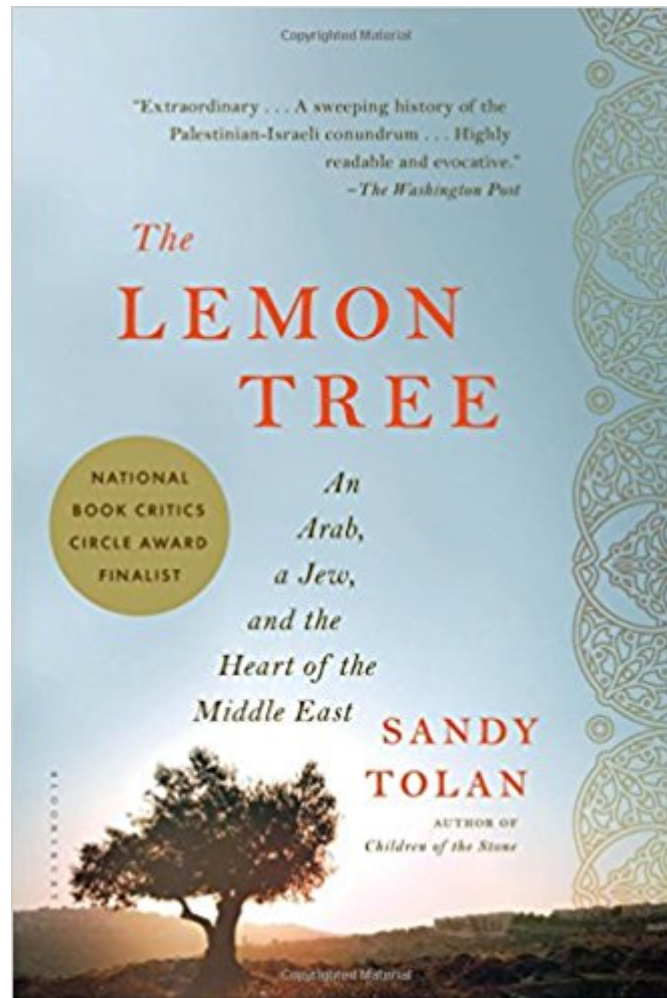




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# The Lemon Tree: An Arab, A Jew, And The Heart Of The Middle East



## Synopsis

In 1967, Bashir Khairi, a twenty-five-year-old Palestinian, journeyed to Israel with the goal of seeing the beloved stone house with the lemon tree behind it that he and his family had fled nineteen years earlier. To his surprise, when he found the house he was greeted by Dalia Eshkenazi Landau, a nineteen-year-old Israeli college student, whose family left fled Europe for Israel following the Holocaust. On the stoop of their shared home, Dalia and Bashir began a rare friendship, forged in the aftermath of war and tested over the next half century in ways that neither could imagine on that summer day in 1967. Sandy Tolan brings the Israeli-Palestinian conflict down to its most human level, demonstrating that even amid the bleakest political realities there exist stories of hope and transformation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Tolan offers listeners an easy-to-follow journey through a maddeningly stubborn conflict that has infused global politics since the 1940s. Based on his 1998 NPR documentary, Tolan personalizes the Arab-Israeli conflict by tracing the intertwined lives of a Palestinian refugee named Bashir Al-Khairi and a Jewish settler named Dalia Eshkenazi Landau. The pair is connected through a stone home in Ramla, now part of Israel. Built in the 1930s by Bashir's father, the Al-Khairi family was forced to flee during the violent formation of Israel in 1948. The Eshkenazis, Holocaust survivors from Bulgaria, became the new owners. After 1967's Six Day War, Bashir showed up and Dalia invited him in and began an intense dialogue that's lasted four decades. Tolan's evenhanded

narration imparts the passion of both sides without slipping into impassioned delivery. While at times his random emphasis of words makes for a slightly wavy cadence, his pronunciation of Arab and Jewish names and phrases is pleasingly authentic. One of Tolan's most moving passages chronicles Dalia 20-mile trip to Ramallah to visit Bashir. Their seemingly simple conversation, rendered with just the right amount of heart, crystallizes and humanizes the positions of each side. The Lemon Tree is a clear-eyed and steady ride into deeply felt and ever-volatile territory. Simultaneous release with the Bloomsbury hardcover (Reviews, Mar. 27). Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** To see in human scale the tragic collision of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, Tolan focuses on one small stone house in Ramla--once an Arab community but now Jewish. Built in 1936 by an Arab family but acquired by a Jewish family after the Israelis captured the city in 1948, this simple stone house has anchored for decades the hopes of both its displaced former owners and its new Jewish occupants. With remarkable sensitivity to both families' grievances, Tolan chronicles the unlikely chain of events that in 1967 brought a long-dispossessed Palestinian son to the threshold of his former home, where he unexpectedly finds himself being welcomed by the daughter of Bulgarian Jewish immigrants. Though that visit exposes bitterly opposed interpretations of the past, it opens a real--albeit painful--dialogue about possibilities for the future. As he establishes the context for that dialogue, Tolan frankly details the interethnic hostilities that have scarred both families. Yet he also allows readers to see the courage of families sincerely trying to understand their enemy. Only such courage has made possible the surprising conversion of the contested stone house into a kindergarten for Arab children and a center for Jewish-Arab coexistence. What has been achieved in one small stone building remains fragile in a land where peacemaking looks increasingly futile. But Tolan opens the prospect of a new beginning in a concluding account of how Jewish and Arab children have together planted seeds salvaged from one desiccated lemon tree planted long ago behind one stone house. A much-needed antidote to the cynicism of realpolitik. Bryce Christensen Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Sandy Tolan's "The Lemon Tree" was a thought provoking novel detailing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Tolan presented information from various points of views, creating an unbiased account of the conflict that allowed the reader to form their own opinions based on facts. This book was filled

with historical accounts that revealed the background of the conflict and set the stage for the humanizing aspect weaved throughout the book. Tolan tells the emotional story of Dalia Eshkenazi and Bashir Khairi, and their struggle over the right to a home that has been unwillingly transferred from one to another. Their daily struggle over a home is symbolic of the moral struggle over a land that has been occupied by two different people groups who are unwilling to relinquish control. This personal account brings an emotional and personal angle to the often over-told and over-generalized struggle that many people have simply become accustomed to hearing about. It instills a sense of urgency in readers concerning the resolution of the topic, as it shows the daily struggle that the citizens of modern day Israel are experiencing. I would highly recommend this novel to anyone looking to understand more about the background of modern day Israel, the conflicts surrounding it, or the emotions that are so deeply ingrained in their cultures.

In a conflict like the Israeli-Palestinian one, the truth seems to always be elusive. It is more often than not a question of perspectives and beliefs. And beliefs are only stories that we keep hearing repeated again and again and which are being reinforced and strengthened because we tend to only see that which we already believe to begin with. Most Americans only know the Israeli side propagated by the powerful Israeli lobby that dominates US politics and so it is refreshing to come across a book that tells a different tale, or rather tales of both sides. It is only by putting ourselves in others' shoes that we can truly appreciate their suffering. Tolani does just that. His enormous compassion and talent as a historian and researcher serve him well in depicting the human dimension behind the conflict though I resisted feeling more hopeless than ever by the time I finished his book. The increasing tensions in the region and the mounting inflexibility of the current Israeli government combined with the impotence of the Palestinian Authority leaves no possibility for a viable two state solution. Ultimately, I believe the Palestinians and Israelis will be living in one secular democratic state. After all, basing a nation's identity on its religion - be it Islam, Judaism or Christianity - stands against the progressive ideals of diversity, inclusion and freedom.

Except for the fact that I became depressed in the second half of the book, this is just about a perfect non-fiction book about the Palestinian-Israeli differences and all the historical deceptions and betrayals that have led them to their current, apparently insolvable differences. I read it in the context of an Interfaith book group. We have, collectively, had trouble finding books that are even-handed in their coverage of religious differences. We find books good from one point of view or another and learn from each, but rarely have we found such a just and comprehensive book as

this. Tolan uses the lemon tree and the specific focus on one Palestinian and one Israeli to open up the entire history, but the focus allows us to read it almost as a novel. The book includes many things that we did not know, such as the story of the Jews in Bulgaria and the Bulgarians non-compliance with their Third Reich ally--very thorough historically, well-researched. The depression I referred to is about any hope for resolution. The absolute intransigence of one side or another, all the lies told, the holding on to resentment from one generation to another, all seem to mitigate against any solution. We need to know all about this and try to understand as a first step. Almost as much harm seems to have been caused by outsiders thinking they can force a resolution upon the parties involved as by any stubbornness from the parties themselves. I highly recommend this book, as a way to learn and understand, as a very readable first step.

When I purchased this book, I thought it was going to be more of a novel. I thought it would be the story of the two families. I was not prepared for the amount of historical detail and description. I almost gave up reading it several times as the history part didn't hold my interest and it was difficult to digest. But I am glad I persevered. With an upcoming trip to Israel, this gave me an excellent understanding of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict past and present. It certainly changed my viewpoint as well.

It's worth a read, especially if you would like some understanding from both sides of the conflict. I was frustrated about the excessive historical parts in the beginning, but as I got deeper into understanding it, it became very interesting and I wanted more and more. The writing style wasn't always smooth, but still very readable to me. After reading this book it gets me thinking, what's to stop the hundreds of different ethnic groups around the world from invading a region and claiming it as a land of their own because they believe they deserve their own private country? Every group has lived somewhere before right?

While the book started off great, I found it to be overloaded with repetitive, sometimes insignificant, details. It began to feel as though it needed a better editor. There were long, boring passages, and I found myself skimming over them without compromising the story. The characters were generally well-developed, especially Bashir and Dahlia, but I discerned a distinctly pro-Palestinian bias by the author, in his reluctance (avoidance?) to actually admit that Bashir was, indeed, a terrorist, responsible for much violence. This Israel-Palestine conflict is a highly-complex subject, and I got the feeling that the author felt the need to cram in all the facts that his research

revealed, at the expense of the story.

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