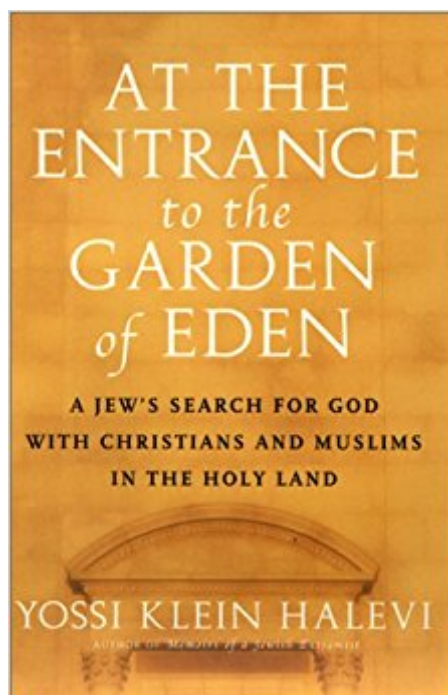




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At The Entrance To The Garden Of Eden: A Jew's Search For God With Christians And Muslims In The Holy Land



Synopsis

Yossi Klein Halevi's first book, *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist*, a remarkable coming-of-age story, was lauded by the New York Times as being "of burning importance ... a drama central to the very soul of Jewish life." Now, in *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*, Halevi describes his unprecedented and extraordinary spiritual journey to discover, as a religious Israeli Jew, a common spiritual language with his Christian and Muslim neighbors in the Holy Land. While religion has fueled the violent conflict plaguing the Middle East, Halevi wondered whether it could be a source of unity as well. To find the answer, he began a two-year exploration of the devotional life of Christianity and Islam. He followed their holiday cycles, befriended Christian monastics and Islamic mystics, and joined them in prayer in monasteries and mosques -- searching for wisdom and holiness in places that are usually off-limits to outsiders of other faiths. In this gripping work, Halevi candidly reveals how he fought to resolve his own fears and anger as a Jew and came to relate to Christians and Muslims as fellow spiritual seekers. He chronicles the difficulty of overcoming obstacles -- theological, political, historical, and psychological -- that separate believers of the three monotheistic faiths. And he introduces a dynamic range of fascinating individuals attempting to reconcile the dichotomous heart of this sacred place -- a struggle central to Israel, but which resonates for us all. Written in lyrical prose, Halevi takes his search for God into the heart of the Middle Eastern conflict. He insists on a spirituality that isn't escapist but instead confronts the wounds of history. The result is a book startlingly original and bold, one that embraces and transcends the categories of politics and faith.

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Customer Reviews

Yossi Klein Halevi, born in America and now an Israeli citizen, embarked on a spiritual quest in order to appreciate the religious dimensions of conflicts in the Middle East. Beginning in 1998, he undertook "an attempt at religious empathy" in order "to test whether faith could be a means of healing rather than intensifying the conflicts in this land." Halevi, author of the critically acclaimed *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist*, chose "to pray and meditate with my Christian and Muslim fellow believers," as "a conscious refutation of the way we religious people of different faiths have always judged each other--by what we believe about God, rather than how we experience God's presence." The holy days of each religion form the structure of *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*, and Halevi's encounters with Sufi dervishes, Muslim sheiks, monks, nuns, and laypeople are entertaining, poignant, and sometimes fearsome. The stories do not separate "spirituality" from "politics"--or history, psychology, or theology. His commitment to describing an integrated experience of the many aspects of religious life helps to make the book a successful exercise in empathy, and a book of lasting literary value. --Michael Joseph Gross

The political landscape of the Middle East has inspired many books, but few have focused on the intersection of its religious paths as healing territory. This is where Jerusalemite Halevi, a transplanted American Jewish journalist, breaks ground. To become more at home in Israel, a land that 800,000 Muslims and 200,000 Christians call home, and to seek out an alternative to the Oslo peace process, Halevi visited monasteries and mosques, Sufi sheiks, humble monks and silent nuns. In the two years of his interfaith spiritual journey, he confronted history, theology, politics, psychological taboos and concerns over personal safety, learning much concerning the two faiths he previously knew little about. His search for holiness brings him to "conflicting versions of truth," but he attempts nonetheless to experience unity through prayer and meditation: he surrenders to a whirling Sufi zikr, debates with Armenian priests, spends Holy Week with the Ethiopian Orthodox and explores the depths of silence with cloistered nuns. To visit a sheik in Gaza, he ventures to the same spot he had patrolled and where he was wounded as a soldier. Despite his successes, relating to Christianity and Islam "as spiritual paths rather than as devouring forces that had tried to displace the Jews proved even more difficult than I'd imagined." Halevi's forthright prose, which evokes the immediacy of his encounters, does not try to gloss over his religious and political resentments, yet exudes a yearning for commonality and love. Since he sought out the "best representatives" of each religion, isolated examples who do not speak for the majority of their co-religionists, Halevi's effort remains an experiment in "testing the border crossing between faiths."

Despite the current outbreak of violence, he concludes, religion must be an integral part of the process if peace is to come to the Middle East. Readers of all religions will appreciate the honesty of this spiritual walkabout. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

While fascinating in its very intimate portrayal of the holy land's most religious residents, one of the truly great things about this book is the author's humility. Rabbi Halevi's journey into the holy land is done out of love for humanity and love for God: unlike Islam and Christianity (the former of which is my interest), Judaism is not an evangelical religion, meaning that Halevi was free to observe, free to live among and free to enjoy the beauty of these two other religions. His challenges, his desperate hope for the region, and his humility amongst people who believe very differently makes this book what it is, namely a personal journey during an incredibly important period of time. If you've ever wondered why we can't just get along, this is the book for you. I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Halevi in person, and he is as kind in person as he appears through his writing. He signed my book "With hope, despite everything".

This is a deeply thought-provoking book. I ordered it because I have personally been involved in Jewish-Muslim-Christian dialogues (trialogues?) in the USA, and I resonated with the reviews I had read. What surprised (and saddened) me was the extreme difficulty that Yossi had in even finding people willing to dialogue in the Middle East. I had been told that Israel was a segregated society (not officially, but socially) but I did not realize how deeply the mistrust runs. Villages and monasteries that are within visual sight of each other might as well be on different planets. To cross the cultural divide can literally mean taking your life into your hands. Author Yossi Klein takes that risk. With the help of various unconventional guides, he meets with Sufi shaykhs, Armenian priests, Catholic nuns and many others, hoping to communicate on the level of the soul rather than politics. Sometimes he succeeds, sometimes not. On so many occasions, history intrudes with its memories of past brutalities -- Crusades, Inquisitions, the Holocaust. This is not a sugar-coated utopian view of peace, but a scathingly honest chronicle of one seeker's search for common ground in a troubled land. With each new encounter, Yossi struggles with his own anger, distrust, and fear -- as did I when I read the book. Definitely a must-read for everyone who is or wants to be involved in interfaith dialogue.

One of the most readable historical and theological account of the Israel, Palestine conflict. Read in conjunction with Naim Stifan Ateek's 'Justice and Only Justices - A Palestinian Theology of

Liberation', Yossi Klein Halevi 2001 writings may just offer some direction back to 'the Garden of Eden' for Jews, Muslims and Christians alike.

The title is exact. Halevi is an extraordinary person: a mystic deeply rooted in his Jewish faith but who can share a common search for peace and religious experience with Christians, the historic persecutors of Jews, and with Muslims, who have now become the "enemy." I know three of the communities of Christians he shared with and the descriptions are accurate so I can assume the Muslim sections are just as fair. Anyone searching for religious and mystic truth that is non-violent but serious about faith and God will love this book.

Great book. Great condition. A thought provoking account of a religious journey through the Holy Land. I strongly recommend it

This book ranks up there with G.I. Gurdjieff's Meetings with remarkable men!! This book is a four year window into the deepest fears of a Jewish man in modern Israel. It is also a graphic window into the souls of the people who he befriends along the way. This is a must read for truth seekers of all ages. I would love to send a copy to each of my friends and know that they would enjoy it as much as I.

Great book. Bittersweet given current situation

fine book

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