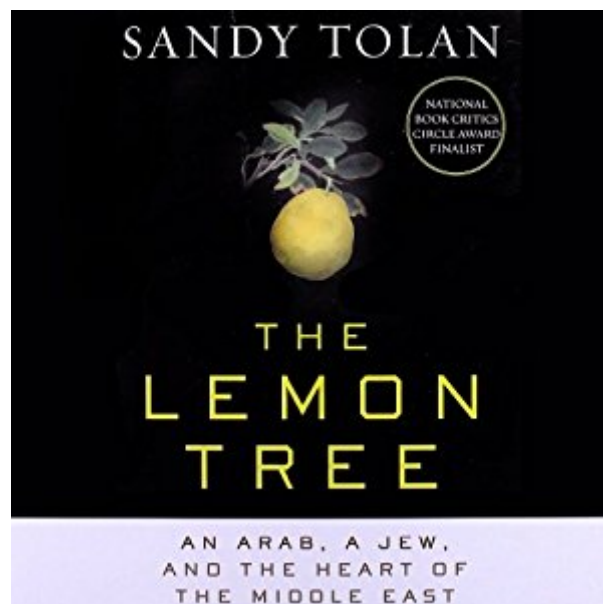


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# The Lemon Tree



## Synopsis

The tale of a simple act of faith between two young people - one Israeli, one Palestinian - that symbolizes the hope for peace in the Middle East. In 1967, not long after the Six-Day War, three young Arab men ventured into the town of Ramle, in what is now Jewish Israel. They were cousins, on a pilgrimage to see their childhood homes; their families had been driven out of Palestine nearly 20 years earlier. One cousin had a door slammed in his face, and another found his old house had been converted into a school. But the third, Bashir Al-Khairi, was met at the door by a young woman called Dalia, who invited them in. This act of faith in the face of many years of animosity is the starting point for a true story of a remarkable relationship between two families, one Arab, one Jewish, amid the fraught modern history of the region. In his childhood home, in the lemon tree his father planted in the backyard, Bashir sees dispossession and occupation; Dalia, who arrived as an infant in 1948 with her family from Bulgaria, sees hope for a people devastated by the Holocaust. As both are swept up in the fates of their people, and Bashir is jailed for his alleged part in a supermarket bombing, the friends do not speak for years. They finally reconcile and convert the house in Ramle into a day-care centre for Arab children of Israel, and a center for dialogue between Arabs and Jews. Now the dialogue they started seems more threatened than ever; the lemon tree died in 1998, and Bashir was jailed again, without charge. The Lemon Tree grew out of a 43-minute radio documentary that Sandy Tolan produced for Fresh Air. With this audiobook, he pursues the story into the homes and histories of the two families at its center, and up to the present day. Their stories form a personal microcosm of the last 70 years of Israeli-Palestinian history. In a region that seems ever more divided, The Lemon Tree is a reminder of all that is at stake, and of all that is still possible.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is both a "must read" and at the same time it is deeply flawed. If you are seeking an emotional and decidedly gripping account of the Middle-east conflict this is an excellent choice. It will also serve admirably to put a face on both sides of the conflict. It should challenge the everyone who already associates themselves with a position on the matter to question their beliefs and to seriously consider the point of view of the other side in a meaningful way. That said, where this book falls down is in the objectivity department. Put simply the author clearly attempted mightily to be unbiased and balanced but still allowed personal bias and spin to infiltrate the book. In its weakest form, the author's bias makes him much more likely to credit accounts favorable to the Palestinian Arabs and hostile to the Palestinian Jews\* (Hereafter "Israelis"). He often sites sources and historians with a known and recognizable agenda, as well as "fringe" sources. However, this is largely forgivable because he sometimes also provides a balancing point of view to compensate or at least admits when facts are in significant dispute. However, a worse failing is the tendency to systematically "spin" information to the detriment of Israel. For example, in a later chapter on the 2nd Intifada (the riots, or uprisings, or terrorist acts, or insurgency -depending on who you ask- of 2000 and following years) he mentions the Israeli accusation that Palestinian gunmen operated from behind a screen of civilians, usually children. He goes on to say that a UN investigation revealed that this was "the exception rather than the rule." This is a case of "spin" when one considers that the UN actually confirmed that the Israeli accusation was founded in fact.

Sandy Tolan's THE LEMON TREE encapsulates the Israeli-Palestinian dilemma better than anything I've read to date. It does so by telling the true story of two families who occupied and loved the same house in the West Bank town of Ramla: the Palestinian Khairis who built it and lived in it up until 1948 and the Bulgarian Jewish Eshkenazis who lived in it from 1948 until 1984. It is the perfect metaphor for the intractable problem of two peoples who have historical claims to the same piece of real estate. Tolan's central figures are Bashir Khairi and Dalia Eshkenazi who meet for the first time in the aftermath of the Six Day War and maintain a tenuous friendship into the 21st century. His narrative has a distinctly novelistic style. (In fact another reviewer refers to it as "a trashy, bitter novel") Tolan begins by introducing the reader to Bashir's and Dalia's parents in the 1930's and describing the societies in which they lived. As with Austen or Tolstoi, one absorbs

social, historical, and political context while trying to guess where the story is leading. For example, I learned in passing that Axis member Bulgaria did the best job of any nation in Europe of protecting its Jewish population from the Nazi death camps. One also encounters future leaders of Israel and of Fatah in unexpected places in Tolan's narrative. The order to expel the Arab inhabitants of Lydda and Ramla during the 1948 War was given by Lt. Col. Yitzhak Rabin. Abu Jihad, Arafat's right hand, who helped launch the first Intifada, was among the children expelled from Ramla. THE LEMON TREE is not a feel-good book. Other reviewers have drawn hopeful conclusions from the relationship of Bashir and Dalia and from the planting of a new lemon tree at the house in Ramla.

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