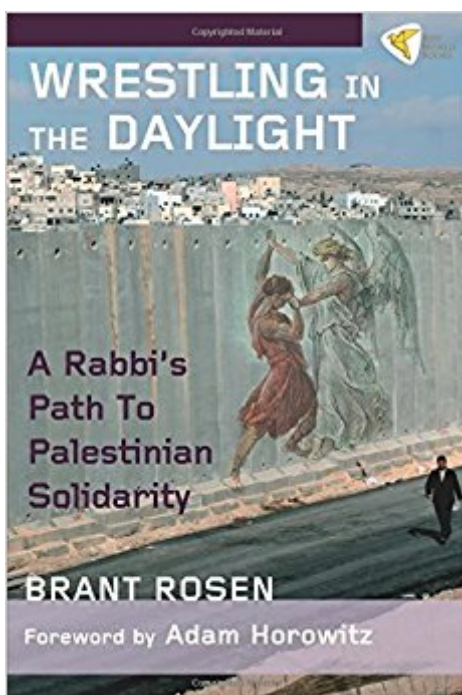


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Wrestling In The Daylight: A Rabbi's Path To Palestinian Solidarity



Synopsis

In 2006, Rabbi Brant Rosen launched a blog called Shalom Rav, in which he reflected on various social-justice issues. In 2008, Israel launched a harsh attack against Gaza and caused Rosen to deeply question his lifelong liberal Zionism. Unlike the biblical Jacob, who wrestled with his conscience in the dark of night, Rabbi Rosen chose to "wrestle in the daylight", which he did through many deep, thoughtful interactions on his blog. In *Wrestling in the Daylight*

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Customer Reviews

Brant Rosen, author of *Wrestling in the Daylight: A Rabbi's Path to Palestinian Solidarity*, is a Chicago-based rabbi, blogger, and social activist. He is currently the director of the American Friends Service Committee Midwest office and co-chair of the Jewish Voice for Peace Rabbinical Council. In 2014, Rosen, who had lengthy previous experience as a congregational rabbi in Evanston, IL, co-founded a social-justice focused congregation called Tzedek Chicago.

Here is a Rabbi, a person dedicated to his faith, and he shows an honesty and a tendency to adhere to the truth he sees, even if that truth is not entirely defended by his faith and by his people. I admire the man and feel exhilarated by his clearness of mind. His statements and the dialog and discussion with people who believe differently opens your eyes to the difficult situation in Israel/Palestine and confirms the need to let ethics speak above self-interest.

Rabbi Brant Rosen has written a most powerful book. Drawing from his blog and from reactions he received from his readers, he illustrates painfully but honestly and clearly his journey toward working for justice for oppressed Palestinians.

This is a must read for everyone wrestling with the tough issues surrounding the Israel/Palestinian conflict. Gives the chance to hear a number of thoughtful people on this seemingly insoluble situation. Unfortunately, it is dated. Much has happened since this book was published in 2010

"I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or to speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen; - but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest - I will not equivocate - I will not excuse - I will not retreat a single inch - AND I WILL BE HEARD. The apathy of the people is enough to make every statue leap from its pedestal, and to hasten the resurrection of the dead."-W.L. Garrison (abolitionist)"My country is the world, my countrymen are mankind"-W.L. Garrison (abolitionist)The title of this "review" is a play on words from a bumper sticker that became popular at the onset of the war in Afghanistan. Remember "Who Would Jesus Bomb"? In a manner of speaking, the question posed by the title confronted Rabbi Rosen in late 2008. Of course, the perplexity of his dilemma went way, way beyond that. Judaism is my beloved path, and Rabbi Rosen speaks well to why it is my beloved. Israel (the People) are in covenant with God, but it is one that has ground rules. Israel (the nation-state) violates seven of the ten big ones daily. The violations begin, fittingly, with the 1st Commandment. Zionism has taken a privileged place before God in the mind and heart of many Jews. Thus, it becomes a false god and to willingly support it, at least in its current formulation and expression, is nothing short of idolatry. Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, as well as the entire ideological enterprise that reproduces it, needs to be recognized as the moral freak shows that they are. When it comes to the topic of Israel, it's difficult to find a Jew being Jewish these days though, thankfully, that is quickly changing among the younger generations of American Jews. In this book, Rabbi Rosen uses a language that is far less severe and cinematic than mine to illustrate his Jewish reaction to both the concept of Israel and the policies of Israel. Accordingly, he speaks with an empathy toward Israel and its policies that I largely lost the capacity for after the death of Rachel Corrie (the event that brought me unfettered clarity regarding Israel). The Rabbi's breath and depth

of understanding of the issues are intellectually satisfying, and his ethical and moral commentaries are a blessing. His voice is not alone here. The Rabbi's blog Shalom Rav (see 's "description") is, as is the Reconstructionist practice, a community experience. I have been equally blessed by the insights offered by its other "participants". The two blog posts that impacted me the most were "The Peace Process is Dead" (included Pg 237 in the book) and his 12/8/10 "Why The Peace Talks Failed" (which is not included in the book. it is a map of Jewish settlements and restricted zones in the West Bank). Regarding the former, I had arrived at the Rabbi's conclusion years before him; however, the Rabbi's comments, paired with Cantor Davis's comment (!), made me fully appreciate that the entire "peace process" is a front masking a process of "creeping ethnic cleansing". The facade merely acts to maintain the status quo by blunting the moral outcry that it incites. Mindful that this sentiment cuts both ways, nationalism is inherently vulgar. The conceits of nationalism murder empathy under the weight of their disdain for anything other than self-serving paranoia and hubris. This, in turn, nurtures a regression to a set of base tribal impulses that invariably crowd out the "Other" with an insatiable juvenilism. The only question remaining for Israel (the nation state) is how much it will continue to debase Judaism, its very relationship to God, by harming precious fellow human beings as it marches toward oblivion in pursuit of self defeating cravings. Israel (the People) must ask: What is gained by the possession of dirt and dust paid for in contempt and violence?

Misplaced sympathy for terrorists.

I had come across one or two of Brant Rosen's blogs and found them to be insightful and stimulating, and so when I found out about this book, I felt confident that it would be worth investing in. My hunch proved to be one worth following. As someone who leads a hectic life balancing work and family commitments, having time to read continuously and uninterrupted is a luxury. So the format of this book was ideal for me. Each chapter stands alone, and in the most part (aside perhaps from chapter 7) the reader does not have to read an entire chapter in one go. Each chapter is themed, and begins with an introductory piece of narrative, setting the scene for the discrete pieces that follow. The introduction is then followed by a collection of writings from Rabbi Rosen's blog, Shalom Rav and in turn, these are followed by a short "discussion." These discussions are essentially a sample of responses to the piece contributed by various people who to varying degrees, agree or disagree with Brant Rosen's analysis. In short, it is a book that can be enjoyed in bite-sized chunks though don't let that put you off. There were occasions when I had a little more time on my hands than at others, and so was able to consume two or three chapters in one sitting

and would gladly have continued to read the book to the end had time allowed. It is certainly very engaging. In publishing his writings (along with the ensuing discussions) the Rabbi is doing the whole world a favour. Anyone who dares to question the policies and actions of the Israeli government can become the target of those for whom Israel can do no wrong. Indeed, at time of writing this review one such individual has reacted to this book not by offering a critique (he would need to have read it to have done that!) but by impugning Brant Rosen and his denigrating his work. But clearly Brant Rosen is not afraid to speak out against oppression. In fact more than that, he clearly considers challenging injustice to be his duty. For him it is a big part of living his faith. But to be a critical friend to Israel especially as that often results in accusations of being an "Israel-hater" is a step that many are too timid to take and in that context, Rabbi Rosen is to be applauded. He does not claim to have the answer to everything. Often he poses questions as well as attempting to answer them. In his chapter "Beyond Tribalism" he observes the irony that in a world where easy travel and the internet have facilitate the making of connections between people and countries, that Israel has become an "increasing militarized Jewish garrison state" resulting in a situation whereby even young Jews in America and elsewhere feel disconnected from the country. He poses the questions, "Is this the kind of Judaism we seek to espouse? To pass to our children? Do we truly believe it points the way to a better Jewish future?" I am sure these questions are uncomfortable for many. Indeed, some of the various correspondents reacting to the Rabbi's various blogs to seem to react in a defensive manner. But these are definitely questions worthy of consideration. Brant Rosen admits within the same chapter that, "I don't believe that we as American Jews can even begin to understand how Israelis feel." This is a candid admission, but does this mean he is not qualified to comment simply because he is not living in Israel? Personally despite this admission, I would refute any suggestion that he "doesn't understand." He may not have personal experience of living his whole life inside Israel, but neither does he have personal experience of living under occupation on the West Bank or under siege in Gaza, but as a man clearly blessed with great empathy, he can appreciate something of the conditions of all people tied to that region and recognises and acknowledges all of their hopes and aspirations. He remains convinced that dialogue rather than fighting is part of the solution. That and the need for some kind of peace and reconciliation process in which the side with all of the power and military might takes the courageous steps needed to secure a peaceful and just future for all. As Lori, one of the participants in one of the discussions stimulated by Brant Rosen's words eloquently observes, "To me, Zionism isn't about waving the flag and cursing the Arabs. It's about finding a practical way to ensure Israel's survival.....There is no way to win by force in this case." The overall tone of all of the discussions presented in this book is

that of constructive and respectful dialogue. Even where people do not agree with points being made, they are conducting their debates in a calm and civilised way. I found myself becoming very fond of many of the contributors, and not just those whose views chime with my own. It is a shining example of how to air differences, even when those differences are seemingly irreconcilable. For anyone who considers that the contents of this book are likely to be "one-sided" then allow me to illustrate how such prejudiced thinking would be wrong. Chapter 7 is particularly interesting. It is a conversation conducted in public between the Rabbi and David, a close and longstanding friend of his. They have very different perspectives. One commentator, Israel Gershon clearly feels that David is right and Brant Rosen is wrong - not just on specifics, but on the situation in general. He writes, "Bravo, David! And thank you, Rabbi, for allowing this exchange. I am one who finds your demonizing of Israel to be of disservice to Israel, the Jewish people and the cause of peace." To me, the inclusion of opposing voices is what really makes this book a gem. You could hardly describe it as propaganda when considering that the author gives everyone a voice - including the people who disagree with him (though again, note the respectful tone of Israel Gershon's alternative view... including the polite note, "thank you, Rabbi....") Whenever I write a review, I feel it is important to also highlight any perceived weakness, and I do have one criticism of this book. In chapter 8 ("The Freedom Flotilla and Gaza's Humanitarian Crisis") Rabbi Rosen turns his attention to the boarding of the Mavi Marmara on 31 May 2010 - the anniversary of which has just passed. In his introduction he makes reference to an on board "firefight". To me, describing what was very clearly a violent skirmish in which nine activists died as a firefight suggests a battle between two sides, both of which were in possession of guns and both of which were firing live rounds of ammunition. I have seen no evidence that those aboard the ship had guns. Indeed, as one of the commentators in this chapter has pointed out, recording devices including those belonging to accredited journalists were confiscated and have never been returned nor have the contents ever been made public. As Shirin goes on to ask, "Are the Israelis afraid of what those recordings will reveal?" So I do think that the use of this term is perhaps a little misleading. But this is the only criticism I would have of this book and it is certainly not enough for me to consider awarding it anything other than five stars. In summary, this is a well written, balanced, thought provoking and above all, inspiring book and I have no hesitation in recommending it to anyone genuinely interested in the Israel Palestine conflict. I have no doubt I will be quoting from this book for many years to come and I have certainly signed up to Rabbi Brant Rosen's "Shalom Rav" blog. He is a man worth listening to.

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