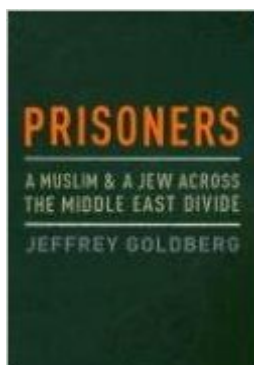




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Prisoners: A Muslim And A Jew Across The Middle East Divide



Synopsis

They met in 1990 during the first Palestinian uprising—•one was an American Jew who served as a prison guard in the largest prison in Israel, the other, his prisoner, Rafiq, a rising leader in the PLO. Despite their fears and prejudices, they began a dialogue there that grew into a remarkable friendship—•and now a remarkable book. It is a book that confronts head-on the issues dividing the Middle East, but one that also shines a ray of hope on that dark, embattled region. Jeffrey Goldberg, now an award-winning correspondent for *The New Yorker*, moved to Israel while still a college student. When he arrived, there was already a war in his heart—•a war between the magnetic pull of tribe and the equally determined pull of the universalist ideal. He saw the conflict between the Jews and Arabs as the essence of tragedy, because tragedy is born not in the collision of right and wrong, but of right and right. Soon, as a military policeman in the Israeli army, he was sent to the Ketziot military prison camp, a barbed-wire city of tents and machine gun towers buried deep in the Negev Desert. Ketziot held six thousand Arabs, the flower of the Intifada: its rock-throwers, knifemen, bomb-makers, and propagandists. He realized that this was an extraordinary opportunity to learn from them about themselves, especially because among the prisoners may have been the future leaders of Palestine. *Prisoners* is an account of life in that harsh desert prison—•mean, overcrowded, and violent—•and of Goldberg's extraordinary dialogue with Rafiq, which continues to this day. We hear their accusations, explanations, fears, prejudices, and aspirations. We see how their relationship deepened over the years as Goldberg returned to Washington, D.C., where Rafiq, quite coincidentally, had become a graduate student, and as the Middle East cycled through periods of soaring hope and ceaseless despair. And we see again and again how these two men—•both of them loyal sons of their warring peoples—•confront their religious, cultural, and political differences in ways that allowed them to finally acknowledge a true, if necessarily tenuous, friendship. A riveting, deeply affecting book: spare, impassioned, energetic, and unstinting in its candor about the truths that lie buried within the animosities of the Middle East.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Not a light read, this memoir of the author, an American-bred Zionist, and his 15-year relationship with a Palestinian insurgent is bound to have detractors, in part because New Yorker Washington correspondent Goldberg is painfully honest—about his dreams, limitations and anxieties. "I wanted to... have it all," he writes, "my parochialism, my universalism, a clean conscience, and a friendship with my enemy." Goldberg lived in Israel as a college student, sharpening the contradictory emotions shared by many of his American peers and eventually watching his former certainty crumble under the weight of military service at Ketziot, an Israeli prison. Grounded in his relationship with a prisoner, Goldberg's book travels from Long Island to Afghanistan as he struggles to understand Israeli-Palestinian violence. His honesty is itself high recommendation; the book is also marked by beautiful turns of phrase and a forthrightness that saves it from occasional self-importance. Some readers will argue with some of Goldberg's assertions (such as his reading of Israel's offer to Arafat at Camp David), and the author's halting recognition of the role despair plays in shaping Palestinian thought. Like the warring nationalisms it presents, his book is complex and deeply affecting. (Oct. 9) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Starred Review With the Middle East ablaze again, a lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems more distant than ever. So this timely and hopeful memoir reminds us that decent men of goodwill can strive to bridge even the widest gulf. Goldberg is an American-born Jew raised in a liberal, nonobservant family. He "discovered" Zionism in adolescence and immigrated to Israel as a young man. He had romantic dreams of fighting to defend the Jewish homeland. Instead, he spent his military service as a prison guard at Ketziot, a bleak desert jail where Palestinians, many who fought in the first Intifada, were warehoused. Goldberg provides incisive observations of various aspects of Israeli and Palestinian societies, including the decline of the kibbutz movement, ideological divisions between Fatah and Hamas, and, of course, the grinding monotony (for both

guards and prisoners) of prison life. But the core of this story is Goldberg's evolving friendship with a prisoner named Rafiq.^B At first, they reach out warily toward each other, but the genuine warmth and affection that grow surprise and even unsettle them. Their friendship endures, even after Rafiq is released and returns to the political hothouse of Gaza while Goldberg becomes a journalist. Goldberg has no illusions that he and his friend, working at the "subatomic" level, have solved seemingly intractable larger problems, but his poignant account offers the possibility of reconciliation. Jay Freeman

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I spent a great amount of time in this area of the world and found Jeff Goldberg "right on" in all the locations he experiences throughout the book. I was surprised though that he did not change the names of all the Palestians in the book. I know this because I have met most of them in my business dealing or know people who know them. But thats ok- it makes it even more entertaining for us. My question is : "Why has Goldberg NOT written another book since this one?" I love his writing style!! I am so "thirsty" to read more of his work in a book vs. magazine article. If you are interested in the Middle East- this is a must read, as well as Thomas Friedman's "From Beirut to Jerusalem"- updated version.

One of the best books I have ever reda..spell binding and full of humor despote a very dramatic stpry.

Jeffrey Goldberg is an excellent, engaging writer who brings a deeply-considered perspective to a very difficult topic. Personal but framed broadly, I gained excellent insight into the true dynamics in this situation. Left me sad and doubtful about the prospects for peace but enriched my understanding greatly.

Excellent book, but the paperback edition could use better paper.

Just as he does in his blog, Jeffrey Goldberg presents a nuanced picture of Israel from the perspective of a Zionist and lover of the Jewish people.

What a fantastic book.Jeff Goldberg takes us through his life's journey from an aspiring child zionist to his time as an Israeli military police officer, his return to America for life as a journalist, and his return to Gaza and other cities in Palestine where he tries to reconnect with many of the prisoners

he watched over during his time as a "shoter" (policemen) in the prisons. Without telling too much of the outcome, I will say that the many experiences are thrilling, very telling of the situations, and seldom experienced by anyone. It is very rare to find someone trying to find a prisoner he once watched over so that he can open his home to that person. This will open up a whole new set of experiences and ideas for Goldberg. What drives Goldberg to do this? Maybe it was his desire to end his own personal conflict with the course of middle eastern politics. Maybe it was his apologetic retribution for being a police officer in a Palestinian prison. Maybe it was his want to show the Palestinian people that the Israelis are prisoners too, to the hostility that is perpetuated by suicide bombings. Maybe he thought he could end the conflict by reaching out. After reading the book, all the complexities and truths that exist within this conflict become more clear. The perspective he brings is fascinating and worth being read by anybody who has a care about the situation in Israel/Palestine.

I read it in 2 nights. It is truly brilliantly perceptive and indescribably sad - he, like so many, see no solution, not really, despite his theme of coexistence. By now there's so much hatred on both sides, so much misunderstanding, so much blood shed unnecessarily, that any happy end is virtually impossible. Ruth Weiss, Author, Germany

This is a must for anyone Jew, Muslim gentile (like me) who despairs at the Israeli/Palestinian problem to be confirmed in the view that there are people of good will on both sides where common humanity exists but unfortunately frustrated by those in power who believe that force is the only way forward

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