



The Fate of Zionism: A Secular Future for Israel & Palestine

Arthur Hertzberg

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Internationally known historian and rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, best known for his classic *The Zionist Idea*, challenges us to reexamine the case for the legitimacy of the state of Israel from a secular point of view. He argues that the religious blinders of absolute thinking and hatred have obscured our vision. In this time of great turmoil in the Mideast, when conflict represents a potential nuclear threat to the region and to the world, it is an argument that is more relevant and urgent than ever.

Charting a pragmatic middle path between the Israeli right wing and critics like Edward Said and Noam Chomsky, Hertzberg chronicles the conflict between the original secular vision of Israel and the illusions that came in the subsequent riptide of Israeli triumphalism and the myths of messianism. The deep need of the Israeli people for both power and security has created a paradox, one that can only be solved when the deeper question of legitimacy is addressed in a clear-eyed, secular fashion, away from the growing threat of clashing right wings and religious violence. Hertzberg calls us to go back to the future, to the original idea behind the founding of Israel -- that a people persecuted, marginalized, and murdered under state sanction need a safe land, a place to be independent and free.

Between the growing religiously motivated blindness of the right wing (Arab, Jewish, and American Christian), and the one-sided blindness of the Western liberal intelligentsia, it has become difficult to see the future. Hertzberg calls on the United States to use its power and influence to help recover the original Zionist intent and settle the questions of legitimacy and coexistence for both Israelis and Palestinians.

During his entire career, Hertzberg has been at once supportive of the right to existence of the state of Israel but also a fierce critic of some of its policies -- particularly the abuse of religious sentiments in the social arena. Realistic about the Palestinian injustice that is precipitated, Hertzberg offers a framework for a hopeful solution in a post-religious Zionist realpolitik.

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