

The Other Side of Israel - My journey across the Jewish-Arab divide by
Susan Nathan. Harper Collins 2005.

Susan Nathan is, or was, a Zionist who went to live in Israel in the late 1990s following the end of her marriage. Initially settling in Tel Aviv she subsequently moved to the Arab town of Tamra between Haifa and Nazareth in the Galilee.

The Other Side of Israel contains the story of her awakening to what she passionately believes, and credibly presents, to be the reality of Israel: historically, in terms of the events surrounding the state's foundation, and contemporaneously, in terms of the reality of life for Israeli Arabs, and the endemic anti-Arab racism that pervades Israeli society and is concretised in many government and organizational policies.

Susan Nathan writes movingly about her Palestinian and Israeli Arab friends, and the resignation with which they handle much that confronts them; she also persuasively explains why they feel as frustrated as they do by so much of the aggravation and red tape that surrounds their lives.

This is a deeply disturbing book for any Jew to read, Zionist or non-Zionist, for it presents facts about the past and present of Israel that are morally unacceptable and wholly at odds with the highest teachings of Judaism. Some will dismiss her all too quickly as an Arab loving crank for the sake of preserving their own illusions; others with an open mind will be haunted by what she writes.

Nevertheless only the closed minded could fail to be impressed by the courage of the author in writing the book in the first place and the obvious integrity that underpins everything that she does.

No one who wishes to see a peaceful and egalitarian co-existence between Israelis and Arabs in Israel/Palestine could fail to conclude, having read The Other Side of Israel that the cause of peace could not be better served than by having a few thousand Susan Nathans in the region.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh