

WINNER OF THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD

FROM
Beirut TO
Jerusalem
THOMAS L.
FRIEDMAN

"If you're only going to read one book on the Middle East, this is it." —*Seymour Hersh*



FROM
BEIRUT
TO
JERUSALEM



Thomas L. Friedman

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*For my parents,
Harold and Margaret Friedman*

“Did you want to kill him, Buck?”

“Well, I bet I did.”

“What did he do to you?”

“Him? He never done nothing to me.”

“Well, then, what did you want to kill him for?”

“Why, nothing—only it’s on account of the feud.”

“What’s a feud?”

“Why, where was you raised? Don’t you know what a feud is?”

“Never heard of it before—tell me about it.”

“Well,” says Buck, “a feud is this way: A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then that other man’s brother kills *him*; then the other brothers, on both sides, goes for one another; then the *cousins* chip in—and by and by everybody’s killed off, and there ain’t no more feud. But it’s kind of slow, and takes a long time.”

“Has this one been going on long, Buck?”

“Well, I should *reckon*! It started thirty years ago, or som’ers along there. There was trouble ’bout something, and then a law-suit to settle it; and the suit went agin one of the men, and so he up and shot the man that won the suit—which he would naturally do, of course. Anybody would.”

“What was the trouble about, Buck?—land?”

“I reckon maybe—I don’t know.”

“Well, who done the shooting? Was it a Grangerford or a Shepherdson?”

“Laws, how do I know? It was so long ago.”

“Don’t anybody know?”

“Oh, yes, pa knows, I reckon, and some of the other old people; but they don’t know now what the row was about in the first place.”

—Mark Twain, *The
Adventures of Huckleberry
Finn*

A Middle East Chronology

1882 As a result of the persecution of Jews in Russia and Romania a year earlier, the first large-scale immigration of Jewish settlers to Palestine takes place.

1891 Arab notables in Jerusalem send a petition to the Ottoman government in Constantinople demanding the prohibition of Jewish immigration to Palestine and Jewish land purchases.

1896 Austrian journalist Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, publishes his pamphlet *The Jewish State*, which argues that the "Jewish Problem" can be solved only by setting up a Jewish state in Palestine, or somewhere else, so that Jews can live freely without fear of persecution. A year later, Herzl organizes the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, to promote immigration to Palestine.

1908 The first Palestinian Arabic newspapers appear: *Al-Quds*, in Jerusalem and *Al-Asma'i* in Jaffa.

1916 The Sykes-Picot Agreement is forged by Britain, France, and Russia, carving up the Ottoman Empire after its defeat in World War I. As part of the agreement, Britain wins effective control over the area of Palestine, and France over the area that is now Lebanon and Syria.

1917 The Balfour Declaration is issued by British Foreign Secretary Arthur J. Balfour, endorsing the idea of establishing a "national home" for the Jewish people in Palestine.

1920 France decrees the formation of the state of Greater Lebanon, knitting together Mt. Lebanon with the regions of Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Akkar, and the Bekaa Valley.

1936–39 Inspired by other Arab nationalist movements, the Arabs of Palestine revolt in an attempt to halt the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Both Jewish settlements and British army units come under attack.

1943 Lebanon's Christian and Muslim leaders agree on a "National Pact" for sharing power and balancing Lebanon's Western and Arab orientations, enabling their country to become a state independent of France.

1947 The United Nations votes to partition Palestine into two states, one for the Jews and one for the Palestinian Arabs, with Jerusalem to become an international enclave.

1948 Britain withdraws from Palestine. Instead of implementing the UN partition plan, the surrounding Arab states join with the local Palestinians to try to prevent the emergence of a Jewish state. Israel is established anyway; Jordan occupies the West Bank and Egypt the Gaza Strip.

1956 Israel, joining forces with Britain and France to attack Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt, occupies most of the Sinai Peninsula. Under pressure from both the United States and the Soviet Union, Israel later withdraws.

1958 The first Lebanese civil war erupts and some 15,000 American troops are sent to Beirut to help stabilize the situation.

1964 Arab heads of state led by Nasser establish the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Cairo.

1967 Israel launches a preemptive strike against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan as they are preparing for war against the Jewish state. The Six-Day War ends with Israel occupying the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank.

1969 Yasir Arafat, leader of the al-Fatah guerrilla organization, is elected chairman of the executive committee of the PLO.

1970 King Hussein's army defeats Arafat's PLO guerrillas in a civil war for control of Jordan.

1973 Egypt and Syria launch a surprise attack against Israeli forces occupying the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights.

1974 An Arab summit conference in Rabat, Morocco, affirms that the PLO is the "sole and legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people.

1975 Civil war breaks out again in Lebanon.

1977 Egyptian President Anwar Sadat goes to Jerusalem, addresses the Israeli parliament, and offers full peace in exchange for a total Israeli withdrawal from Sinai.

1979 Egypt and Israel sign their peace treaty.

1982—February The Syrian government massacres thousands of its own citizens while suppressing a Muslim rebellion launched from the town of Hama.

1982—June to September Israel invades Lebanon. Phalangist militia leader Bashir Gemayel is assassinated after his election as Lebanon's President. Phalangist militiamen massacre hundreds of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut, while the camps are surrounded by Israeli forces. U.S. Marines arrive in Beirut as part of a multinational peacekeeping force.

1983 The American embassy and U.S. Marine headquarters in Beirut are blown up by suicide car bombers.

1984—February The Lebanese government of President Amin Gemayel splinters after Shiite Muslims and Druse in West Beirut launch a revolt against the Lebanese army. President Reagan abandons hope of rebuilding Lebanon and orders Marines home.

1984—September Israel's Labor and Likud Parties join together in a national unity government after July elections end in a stalemate.

1985 Israel unilaterally withdraws its army from most of Lebanon.

1987—December The Palestinian uprising, or *intifada*, begins in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

1988—December Arafat recognizes Israel's right to exist. U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz authorizes the opening of a dialogue with the PLO. Likud and Labor join together to form another national unity government in Israel after another stalemated election.

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FROM
BEIRUT
TO
JERUSALEM

*Prelude: From
Minneapolis to Beirut*

In June 1979, my wife, Ann, and I boarded a red-and-white Middle East Airlines 707 in Geneva for the four-hour flight to Beirut. It was the start of the nearly ten-year journey through the Middle East that is the subject of this book. It began, as it ended, with a bang.

When we got in line to walk through the metal detector at our boarding gate, we found ourselves standing behind three broad-shouldered, mustachioed Lebanese men. As each stepped through the metal detector, it would erupt with a buzz and a flashing red light, like a pinball machine about to tilt. The Swiss police immediately swooped in to inspect our fellow passengers, who turned out not to be hijackers bearing guns and knives, although they were carrying plenty of metal; they were an Armenian family of jewelers bringing bricks of gold back to Beirut. Each of the boys in the family had a specially fitted money belt containing six gold bars strapped around his stomach, and one of them also had a shoe box filled with the precious metal. They sat

next to Ann and me in the back of the plane and spent part of the flight tossing the gold bricks back and forth for fun.

When our MEA plane finally touched down at Beirut International Airport, and I beheld the arrival terminal's broken windows, bullet scars, and roaming armed guards, my knees began to buckle from fear. I realized immediately that although I had spent years preparing for this moment—becoming a foreign correspondent in the Middle East—nothing had really prepared me for the road which lay ahead.

In Minneapolis, Minnesota, where I was born and raised, I had never sat next to people who tossed gold bricks to each other in the economy section on Northwest Airlines. My family was, I suppose, a rather typical middle-class American Jewish family. My father sold ball bearings and my mother was a homemaker and part-time bookkeeper. I was sent to Hebrew school five days a week as a young boy, but after I had my bar mitzvah at age thirteen, the synagogue interested me little; I was a three-day-a-year Jew—twice on the New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and once on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). In 1968, my oldest sister, Shelley, spent her junior year abroad at Tel Aviv University; it was the year after Israel's dramatic victory in the Six-Day War—a time when Israel was very much the “in” place for young American Jews. Over the Christmas break of 1968 my parents took me to Israel to visit my sister.

That trip would change my life. I was only fifteen years old at the time and just waking up to the world. The flight to Jerusalem marked the first time I had traveled beyond the border of Wisconsin and the first time I had ridden on an airplane. I don't know if it was just the shock of the new, or a fascination waiting to be discovered, but something about Israel and the Middle East grabbed me in both heart and mind. I was totally taken with the place, its peoples and its conflicts. Since that moment, I have never really been interested in anything else. Indeed, from the first day I walked through the walled Old City of Jerusalem, inhaled its spices, and lost myself in the multicolored river of humanity that flowed through its maze of alleyways, I felt at home. Surely, in some previous incarnation, I must have been a bazaar merchant, a Frankish soldier perhaps, a pasha, or at least a medieval Jewish chronicler. It may have been my first trip abroad,

but in 1968 I knew then and there that I was really more Middle East than Minnesota.

When I returned home, I began to read everything I could get my hands on about Israel. That same year, Israel's Jewish Agency sent a *shaliach*, a sort of roving ambassador and recruiter, to Minneapolis for the first time. I became one of his most active devotees—organizing everything from Israeli fairs to demonstrations. He arranged for me to spend all three summers of high school living on Kibbutz Hahotrim, an Israeli collective farm on the coast just south of Haifa. For my independent study project in my senior year of high school, in 1971, I did a slide show on how Israel won the Six-Day War. For my high-school psychology class, my friend Ken Greer and I did a slide show on kibbutz life, which ended with a stirring rendition of "Jerusalem of Gold" and a rapid-fire montage of strong-eyed, idealistic-looking Israelis of all ages. In fact, high school for me, I am now embarrassed to say, was one big celebration of Israel's victory in the Six-Day War. In the period of a year, I went from being a nebbish whose dream was to one day become a professional golfer to being an Israel expert-in-training.

I was insufferable. When the Syrians arrested thirteen Jews in Damascus, I wore a button for weeks that said *Free the Damascus 13*, which most of my high-school classmates thought referred to an underground offshoot of the Chicago 7. I recall my mother saying to me gently, "Is that really necessary?" when I put the button on one Sunday morning to wear to our country-club brunch. I became so knowledgeable about the military geography of the Middle East that when my high-school geography class had a teaching intern from the University of Minnesota for a month, he got so tired of my correcting him that he asked me to give the talk about the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula while he sat at my desk. In 1968, the first story I wrote as a journalist for my high-school newspaper was about a lecture given at the University of Minnesota by a then-obscure Israeli general who had played an important role in the 1967 war. His name was Ariel Sharon.

During the summer that I spent in Israel after high-school graduation, I got to know some Israeli Arabs from Nazareth, and our chance encounter inspired me to buy an Arabic phrase book and

to begin reading about the Arab world in general. From my first day in college, I started taking courses in Arabic language and literature. In 1972, my sophomore year, I spent two weeks in Cairo on my way to Jerusalem for a semester abroad at the Hebrew University. Cairo was crowded, filthy, exotic, impossible—and I loved it. I loved the pita bread one could buy hot out of the oven, I loved the easy way Egyptians smiled, I loved the mosques and minarets that gave Cairo's skyline its distinctive profile, and I even loved my caddy at the Gezira Sporting Club, who offered to sell me both golf balls and hashish, and was ready to bet any amount of money that I could not break 40 my first time around the course. (Had two racehorses not strolled across the ninth fairway in the middle of my drive, I might have won the bet.)

In the summer of 1974, between my junior and senior years of college, I returned to Egypt for a semester of Arabic-language courses at the American University in Cairo. When I came back to Brandeis, where I was studying for my B.A., I gave a slide lecture about Egypt. An Israeli graduate student in the audience heckled me the entire time asking, "What is a Jew doing going to Egypt?" and "How dare you like these people?" Worse, he got me extremely flustered and turned my talk into a catastrophe I would never forget. But I learned two important lessons from the encounter. First, when it comes to discussing the Middle East, people go temporarily insane, so if you are planning to talk to an audience of more than two, you'd better have mastered the subject. Second, a Jew who wants to make a career working in or studying about the Middle East will always be a lonely man: he will never be fully accepted or trusted by the Arabs, and he will never be fully accepted or trusted by the Jews.

After graduating from Brandeis in 1975, I decided to study with the masters of Middle Eastern Studies—the British. I enrolled at St. Antony's College, Oxford University, where I took a master's degree in the history and politics of the modern Middle East. St. Antony's was everything I had hoped for by way of formal education, but I learned as much in the dining room as in the classroom. As the center of Middle Eastern studies in England, St. Antony's attracted the very best students from the Arab world and Israel. Since there were only about 125 students in the college and we ate three meals a day together, we got to know each other