

Blood Brothers Study Guide

Blood Brothers by Elias Chacour

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Plot Summary

Elias Chacour enjoyed a simple childhood in Biram, a small village in Galilee. School, church, and family met his needs and nurtured his soul, so he grew in the security of love and spirituality. Even as a young child, he particularly enjoyed going off by himself to talk with his hero, Jesus, a man he came to know not just as the Christian savior but as a human with strength and purpose. Life as he knew it came to a violent and crushing end, however, as World War II ended and Zionist Jews, with their militias, moved into Palestine, confiscating Palestinian land, routing entire villages, and driving the natives from their own land. Elias' family was forced from their village, their orchards ultimately being sold to a Zionist investor. In a horrible twist of irony, Elias' father and older brothers, from their new home in Gish, were employed to work in the fig orchards they once owned. Hoping to provide a better future for his young son, Michael Chacour sent Elias to an orphanage in order to receive an education under the supervision of the Bishop. As a student and then seminarian, Elias sought somehow to reconcile what had been inflicted upon his people with the promises of God and Jesus, though he struggled with anger and hatred toward the interloping Zionists well into adulthood. Upon ordination, he was assigned a dying church in the factious village of Ibillin and was forced to confront his own "demons" as he fought to unify its people. His journey to ultimate reconciliation within himself and his subsequent efforts to foster reconciliation among warring peoples, rewrites much of the history of the Middle East, providing the reader with perspectives not given in typical Western history texts. Rather than focus on the injustices of the past, however, Father Chacour, from his current residence in the village of Ibillin, has become a force for peace, justice and reconciliation among all ethnic and religious groups in Israel, bringing dignity to Arabic Palestinians and fostering cooperation and mutual effort toward progress. Chacour has spearheaded the construction of community centers, schools and libraries in native Palestinian villages throughout Israel and has founded the country's first non-sectarian university in Ibillin. He has received praise and honor from fellow Christians, Muslims, and the Israeli government, so much so, that he was named Man of the Year in Israel. *Blood Brothers* is both an authentic picture of the historical development of the current Palestinian issue and a story of the spiritual journey of one man who refused to allow the forces of anger and hatred to consume him.

News in the Wind

News in the Wind Summary and Analysis

Elias Chacour grew up in the village of Biram, a small agricultural community in Palestine, in the 1940's. For generations, his family had owned fig and grape orchards and enjoyed a simple life with the Melkite Christian church at the center of their existence. Palestine itself had been under British rule since the 1930's, and it was generally hoped, by resident and peacefully co-existing Jews, Christians, and Moslems, that an independent state would soon be formed. Palestine had been largely unaffected by World War II, and residents truly believed that they were intact and ready for self-rule.

Sitting high in his favorite tree on a warm afternoon in 1947, Elias realized that something important was happening. His brother had told him that father was purchasing a lamb for an important visitor, and Elders in the town were gathering in groups for serious discussion. Eventually, father sat all the children around the fire for supper and explained the story of Hitler and the Holocaust in Europe during the war. The Jews, he stated, wanted homes far away from Europe, and soon, Jewish soldiers would be arriving from Britain and staying in the homes of villagers for a few days. Father insisted that they would prepare a feast for these soldiers, and that the family would welcome them into their home. The fact that soldiers, not civilian immigrants, were arriving first, triggered an amount of anxiety among many villagers, and, as they were to discover, for good reason.

The current student of the Middle East will perhaps be struck by the depiction of the people of Palestine during this time. While not necessarily living in the same villages, Jews, Moslems, and Christians obviously lived in peace and engaged in travel, barter, and social interactions. Melkite Christians and Jews, specifically, recognized and accepted their common heritage as children of Abraham and thus their intimate tie to one another. There was a climate of cooperation and friendship among these groups, a condition not always understood by Western students, for texts on the subject generally focus on the tensions, violence, and continued Arab threat to the state of Israel.



Treasures of the Heart

Treasures of the Heart Summary and Analysis

All children in the village of Biram attended school in the church. Although Elias loved school and enjoyed hearing about faraway lands, he clearly felt that he learned more from his mother, who consistently related stories of the Bible, particularly about Jesus and the miracles he performed. Of particular interest to Elias, was the Beatitudes that he had preached at Galilee. The Beatitudes were a mystery to Elias, however, for, as a young child, he could not understand how one could be happy or blessed in poverty or grief, or how one could hunger for righteousness. In Jesus, though, he saw strength. He began to go off by himself at an early age, to pray to Jesus, developing what he later described as a friendship. Jesus became Elias' hero, and his daydreams often included visits from and conversations with Him.

Father's perspective was historical, and he made certain that the children knew their heritage. After Jesus and the apostles died, the Church split into factions with different views of the nature of Jesus. Those Christians who remained in Jerusalem continued to believe that Jesus was God and became known as the Melkites. This was the heritage of the Chacour family. From his father, Elias internalized three important principles, as follows: 1) love and respect for Galilean soil, 2) the lives of the Melkites were bound up together with the Jews who also inhabited Palestine. Both were descended from Abraham and so were "blood brothers," and 3) to follow the teaching of Jesus, one must peacefully forgive when wronged by another. Soon, this last principle would be put to the test, as the Zionist soldiers arrived in the village of Biram.



Swept Away

Swept Away Summary and Analysis

As the Zionist soldiers arrive in the village of Biram, brusque and unfriendly, they take up residence in the homes of villagers, including that of Elias' family. Concurrently, Zionist soldiers are battling with British troops in Southern Palestine and winning. As British troops retreat from an area, the Zionists claim the land, pushing all non-Jewish Palestinians out, without compensation. When the United Nations finally steps in, it partitions Palestine, giving fifty-four per cent of the fertile land to the Zionists, forcing Palestinians to migrate to the remaining forty-six per cent of relatively infertile land. In May, 1948, the British withdrew from Palestine completely, leaving the Zionists to pursue their land grabs, blowing up entire villages in their path. This same month, David Ben Gurion, leader of the Zionists, declared the independent state of Israel and assumed the position of Prime Minister in his new government. Nations around the world immediately recognized the state of Israel and began diplomatic relations Ben Gurion.

Native Jewish inhabitants of Palestine expressed shock and dismay over the actions of the Zionists, to no avail. Increasingly, non-Jewish Palestinians were uprooted and forced to become refugees in their own land, crowding into what villages remained. The Zionist soldiers still in Biram informed the villagers that the Irgun, the most violent arm of the Zionist militia, would be arriving soon, and that they should lock up their homes, leave the keys with the current resident soldiers, and evacuate to the hills for safety. The villagers complied, believing that they would soon return. In fact, the village was taken by the Irgun, and they were rendered homeless, their fig, olive, and grape orchards now in the hands of the Zionists. On to the next village of Gish they traveled, only to find that it had been ransacked and the residents buried in shallow graves. Upon settling in Gish and making attempts to live in the substandard remaining housing, the Irgun arrived, forcing all men and older boys into trucks for delivery to some unknown location.

This "cleansing" of Palestine for the Jewish state went almost unrecorded in the journalistic media of the day. Reporters were blocked from admission to towns and villages which had been ransacked and their inhabitants brutally murdered. Arab forces in surrounding countries began to line up on the borders but were fought off by Zionist forces. Through the summer of 1948, approximately one million Palestinians, Christian and Muslim, were driven out of the villages and, eventually, out of Palestine altogether. The world remained silent.



Singled Out

Singled Out Summary and Analysis

Frightened and inconsolable, the women and small children of Gish "moved through the streets and in the garden plots like solemn apparitions" (p. 62). Elias' father and three older brothers were taken, leaving his mother and three small children to tend to their basic needs. Katoub became the "rock" of the village, gathering her strength from prayer and faith, consoling and encouraging the other women of the village. Elias found himself seeking out longer periods of solitude, talking to Jesus and praying for the safe return of the village men and boys. It was during this time that he began to feel that the message from Jesus was peace, and he offered himself to that end, if he could be of use.

A few months later, father and brothers returned with their tale of betrayal and terror. They had been taken to the Jordanian border, unloaded, and forced to flee as the soldiers fired shots above their heads. They had walked back through Syria, at night to avoid discovery, and received no help from Arab villages, who saw them as "dirty Palestinians" and dangerous to their own well-being. It had taken several weeks to get back to Gish, and they were ragged, filthy and starving. Gradually, more men, but not all, returned to Gish, and they were able to live and work without additional harassment from soldiers.

By the end of 1949, things had begun to change somewhat. The new Zionist landowners were unschooled in the proper cultivation of the orchards and needed to employ native Palestinians to care for them. The Chacour fig orchards in Biram had been purchased by an absentee Jewish landowner, and Michael and the three older brothers went to work on their formerly-owned land. Elias was dumbfounded that his father would agree to do this, but father's response was clear: They would pray to God to bless the enemy, because it would bring them peace. If the enemy did not turn away from its "wickedness," then God would deal with that enemy. In addition, Michael Chacour was highly invested emotionally in his trees, and to care for them now would at least preserve them properly. Other villagers left for Haifa, hoping to secure better jobs in the new factories being built by the Jews. To all, it seemed, their peaceful former existence was gone forever as this new government was now thoroughly legitimized by the world community.

Within the new government itself, however, all was not cohesive. Factions had developed, all vying for power, and differing on treatment of the native Palestinians. The elders of the former village of Biram seized upon this opportunity to petition the Israeli Supreme Court for permission to return to their homes. Though this petition was granted, Zionist soldiers still would not allow them in. Elias himself was the victim of the Zionists, when he and his friends were singled out as culprits in the cutting of a telephone line. He and his father were interrogated for hours and Elias beaten. Though it was later discovered that a truck had inadvertently driven over the wire, severing it,



there was never an apology or an admission of a mistake. In response to these events, Elias chose to retreat to solitude, again talking to Jesus and coming to the conclusion that somehow he would become a part of God's plan for peace. In his mind, there had to be a third option between surrender and violence.



The Bread of Orphans

The Bread of Orphans Summary and Analysis

Michael Chacour began to realize that Elias, at age twelve, preeminently, was more spiritually oriented than the other children. Accordingly, when the Church Bishop visited, he requested assistance in locating a school for his youngest son. The Bishop suggested an orphanage in Haifa, located close to the Bishop himself, who would be able to oversee his education. And so, it was decided that Elias would enter the orphanage, with the admonition from Michael that he was not going in order to be someone of privilege with a superior education. He was being sent so that he might become a servant of God and then work toward the reconciliation of enemies.

At the orphanage, Elias was immersed in Biblical study but found himself longing for the more emotional side of religion and the solitude he enjoyed back in Gish. Eventually, he was allowed to stay up past the normal bedtime, and he managed to engage once again in his quiet time with Jesus. It was during this time, as well, that he began a lifelong activity - a journal of letters to Jesus, at this point recounting the struggles of his parents and wondering how this could be part of God's plan. His only desire, as he wrote, was for his parents to return to Biram and their former life of orchard care and serenity. Against this backdrop of study, contemplation and communing with Jesus, brother Rudah arrived for a visit, bringing disturbing news from home. A second Supreme Court ruling had returned Biram to its original residents. This time, the soldiers gave the villagers the date of December 25 for return. On Christmas morning, the villagers of Gish walked to Biram, only to find the village still surrounded by soldiers and tanks. Then, as the returning residents watched, the Zionists destroyed the village. Elias is devastated but, even more, experiences a rage that cannot be reconciled with the teachings of Jesus to love and pray for one's enemies.



The Narrowing Way

The Narrowing Way Summary and Analysis

At the orphanage, Elias began a friendship with Faraj Nakhleh, another student whose parents had sent him to study under the Bishop. At the end of their education at the orphanage, both were then sent to a seminary in Nazareth, to begin the journey toward priesthood. On his very first day, as Elias is in church for prayers, he has a bit of an epiphany. He felt at home, realizing that in this opportunity for solitude, he could find perfect peace. Here, he felt God's presence in an immensely personal way.

Elias and Faraj had a strict and rigorous schedule of study at this seminary. Again the intellectual approach to Biblical study was frustrating for Elias, as he continued to struggle for a personal, emotional relationship with his God and Jesus. He continued to find his mother's favorite passage, the Beatitudes, most disturbing. How could the meek inherit the earth. If you live in happiness and peace, someone can simply kick you off your land; what did hunger and thirst for righteousness mean? Within school life itself, Elias was not without problems as well. He was punished often for breaking the rules, for going to church at the wrong time, or for disagreeing with the teachings and opinions of the brothers. He earned a reputation for not being submissive enough, for asserting his dreams for a rebuilt Biram, for arguing against the hopelessness of the Palestinian situation. The entire issue of the Palestinian problem, including the horrible conditions of the natives in refugee camps in bordering countries, however, was superseded by other Middle East difficulties. Israel had invaded the Sinai Peninsula, insisting it needed a buffer zone between itself and Egypt. When the U.S. insisted that it retreat back to the borders of 1948, however, Israel complied, realizing that support from America was critical to its survival.

As Elias continued to mature and became close to graduation, he realized that being a servant of God as a Christian monk meant more than just drifting around in some "other-worldly" realm. A particularly strict teacher, Father Ghazal, impacted Elias' thinking in a significant way. According to Ghazal, it is not enough to be good; God has to occupy one's body so that His will may be done; one is given struggles so that God can "tame" the spirit. Once an individual lets this happen, he is ready to do God's work. This position solidified Elias' conviction that he needed to put the struggles of his people into the perspective of God's plan and become a "messenger of peace" to his people. How he was to accomplish this was as yet unclear, however, given his indignation over Jewish policies toward non-Jewish Palestinians and as Jews and Palestinians continued to war with one another. Without a definite plan, he made the decision to accompany Faraj to further study at the seminary in Jerusalem, to attain ordination, and to work among the poor. In fact, Elias was excited about this plan, "eagerly trying to fill my emptiness with someone else's dream. And in that moment, I shoved aside the unsettling thoughts and the challenging voice that beckoned me" (p. 108). In the end, neither Faraj nor Elias went to Jerusalem, for it was located in a part of the city partitioned and given to Jordan. Jordan would not allow any "contaminated"

Palestinians from the Jewish section to cross into its borders. Fortunately, the Archbishop arranged for both young men to attend Saint Sulpice in Paris, and there they would be for the next six years.



The Outcasts

The Outcasts Summary and Analysis

Elias and Faraj had a number of challenges as they arrived in Paris. For one thing, neither knew the language, and conquering the language would take some significant commitment and study. Once they were conversant, however, it became apparent that others seminarians were wholly supportive of the Zionist movement and its need to clear Palestine of "potential terrorists." By this time, there were Arab terrorists crossing into Israel and engaging in violent acts against the Jews. Elias and Faraj, in the eyes of their peers, were among the few good Palestinians, however, and the general view of Palestinians by Europeans was that most were evil, ignorant, and violent. As the fedayeen groups grew and gathered at Israel's borders, moreover, the reputation of all Palestinians grew worse. By the 1960's, Palestinians were generally hated the world over.

As before, both Elias and Faraj found spirituality lacking in their rather clinical studies, filled with dogma and ritual. The Bible seemed an impersonal text, as scholars sought to dissect meaning in strictly intellectual and historical terms. Faraj encapsulated the issue with the statement, "The real problem is that Western theology starts with man as the center of all things and tries to force God into some scheme that we can understand. Then He can be regulated. Elias, we've grown up believing that God is the beginning and end of all things. He is central, not an afterthought. He's alive and has His own ways. Here, they want to tame God with their philosophy" (p. 117). Their studies were also colored by world events of the 1960's. The Vietnam War, fear of nuclear disaster, and Christian nations inflicting pain on others, all pointed to a church out of step in its silence, and Elias began to regret that he had come to Europe to experience a church that had become, to him, so meaningless.

During this time, however, Elias was to begin to understand the pain of the Jews as well. Having met a German couple during a retreat, he accepted an invitation to travel to their home in Germany. As he rode the train and was asked to produce his passport, he had a stunning vision of what it must have been like for the Jews in Nazi Germany, to have to produce papers identifying themselves as Jews and to be treated as outcasts, interned, and, ultimately, massacred. His struggle, however, was in the understanding of why, when they had been so persecuted, they would choose to exhibit the same behaviors toward others in Israel.



Seeds of Hope

Seeds of Hope Summary and Analysis

Elias was disturbed that Western Europeans appeared to have perspectives on the Palestinian issue vastly divergent from those of his own experience. Perhaps some research on his own would shed some light on the disparity, research which could be conducted in the public libraries of Paris. What was the true story of how Israel actually came to be at the end of World War II, and why had the persecuted now become the persecutors. In the eyes of the Western world, he knew, the Jews deserved a homeland, their own nation, after what they had endured. Somehow, however, they believed that the Jews had moved into an uninhabited Palestine. What he discovered was as follows:

1. The Zionist movement was founded in the 1890's, as a political movement. The founder was Thomas Herzl, a man who insisted that Palestine was a "land without people" and could become a haven for "downtrodden, impoverished and humiliated Jews in the big city ghettos" (p. 123).
2. There was significant disagreement among Jews about this movement. The more secular felt that it would isolate Jews from the world and increase antisemitism. Further, they argued, wherever they decided to go, there would be some population already there. The Zionists insisted that they would force "re-settlement" of the indigenous population, a decidedly militaristic tone for more moderate Jews.
3. Palestinian history during this time was complex and filled with international intrigue. Until the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire ruled the land with an iron fist. During World War I, Britain made a deal with Palestinian leaders that, once the war ended, Britain would take over Palestine and govern it, gradually turning it over to the Palestinians. Meanwhile, Britain, France and Russia were secretly dividing up the Middle East with the intention of controlling it indefinitely.
4. Between the two World Wars, small settlements of Jews began to crop up in Palestine, but no one paid much attention. But the Zionists in Europe were in the process of entering into an "unholy alliance" with powerful British leaders, one of whom was Lord Balfour, member of Parliament and later Foreign Secretary. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 stated that Britain "viewed with favor the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. The current residents of Palestine were to be considered "non-Jewish communities" (p. 126). The non-Jewish communities of that time comprised ninety-two per cent of the population. In effect, Lord Balfour handed Palestine over to the Zionists, lead by Chaim Weizmann.
5. Palestinian leaders attempted to take the "diplomatic route" to address their concerns relative to the Balfour Declaration and the continued Zionist rhetoric, which posed as a goal a majority Jewish population in Palestine, and, ultimately, a new state of Israel.



More moderate Jews lobbied for consultation with Palestinians and the inclusion of Palestinians in social, cultural, and economic opportunities. The Zionist movement as a result, split into factions. Palestinians, for their part, began to resist further immigration during the 1930's, and this often led to violence between the two groups.

6. By the late 1930's, the Western world was horrified by Hitler, and the Zionists received greater sympathy throughout the world. As Jews left Europe in huge numbers and landed in Palestine, they were fed the propaganda that the Palestinians were a violent people who would resist and terrorize them.

7. By the end of World War II, Britain was far too weakened to take charge in Palestine, while the Zionists were strong and supported by American President Truman. Further, the British in Palestine were often attacked by Zionist militants in an effort to expel them. Finally, Britain gave up its mandate and walked out, leaving the Zionists to traverse Palestine, taking land and violently killing or pushing native Palestinians out, and declaring the independent state of Israel.

8. Though encouraged to do so, many Jews did not wish to emigrate to Israel. They were comfortable in their own surroundings in America and parts of Western Europe, as well as in other Middle Eastern countries, such as Iraq. Violence against Jews in Middle Eastern countries occurred, however, and many quickly ran to Palestine. Later it was discovered that militant Zionist militias were actually responsible for the violence, blaming it on Arab terrorists. The violence was used, moreover, as a huge propaganda campaign in the Western nations, in order to engender greater support for the state of Israel.

Elias was clearly ambivalent following his research. He realized that the Jews, even the Zionists, were all victims. They had been conditioned to believe that "might is right" and that only military solutions would achieve their goals. The "demon" was not the Zionist movement, but militarism itself. "Peace can never be achieved by violence; violence begets more violence" (p. 134). At the same time, Elias was angry about the treachery and deceit resulting in the current situation in Palestine. As he contemplated the meaning of all of this for his vocation, Elias came to realize that he could not spend his life as a typical priest, in a life of prayer and contemplation, but would obviously seek a more worldly mission, to fight unholy alliances between nations which used God in support of military endeavors. There were times, he concluded, when one had to speak out and act upon Christian principles. Faraj's choice of a more contemplative, non-controversial vocation was not incorrect, moreover. God called each individual to a different pursuit. Elias and Faraj returned to Palestine on different paths.



Grafted In

Grafted In Summary and Analysis

Palestine was Israel when Elias returned and had changed considerably. Palestinians were discriminated against in all endeavors, and many youth had turned to drugs, alcohol and crime. Fedayeen from refugee camps in neighboring countries were rather regularly coming across the border to attack Jewish settlements, and Israeli military forces were responding in kind. His once beloved village of Biram stood abandoned by Zionist soldiers and was now deserted, its buildings all in ruins and orchards virtually gone. As Elias came upon his old home, now just a shell, he noticed that his favorite fig tree still stood in the front yard. He was reminded how his father had grafted trees together to make this one and saw the analogy to God's grafting of Jews and Gentiles into his "chosen" ones. He knew God's plan was for all humans to be grafted into a brotherhood. Elias had studied the prophecies of the Old Testament and had come to believe that, though God had promised to return His people (the Jews) to their homeland, He also expected that they accept a broader definition of His children, to include all people of faith.

Receiving his ordination and given his first assignment from the Bishop, Elias traveled to the village of Ibillin. Upon arrival, he was verbally attacked by the Responsible, a lay individual who was charged with keeping the church habitable and managing the finances. This Responsible was angry, following the former priest's hurried departure, the few remaining valuables in tow, and insisted that Elias leave at once. The village did not need a priest, he stated, and very few people came to church anymore. The church itself sat in relative ruin, an unwelcoming place of decay and filth. Elias vowed that he would stay one month, as the Bishop had requested, and then seek a church elsewhere.



Tough Miracles

Tough Miracles Summary and Analysis

Christians in Ibillin felt hopeless. The village contained Moslems, Greek Orthodox and Christians, all vying for power and fighting one another. The Responsible, it soon became evident, was a little dictator who made decisions such as who would be allowed in the church to worship. Elias is determined that, even if only in residence for a month, he will rebuild this congregation by visiting every household in the village. His efforts were not hugely successful, as the villagers viewed him with suspicion, and they certainly did not wish to anger the Responsible.

Realizing that he needed help, Elias went to Nazareth to enlist some support from some Roman Catholic sisters he knew. The Mother Superior knew and loved Elias and, defying her superior, loaned him three sisters to assist on Sundays. Eventually, he was able to use the sisters as medical help for the villagers, and the trust began to grow. Ultimately, the sisters moved to Ibillin to serve every day. Feeling a loss of power, the Responsible attempted to gather his supporters against Elias, and a split was quickly developing. In the midst of the hatred within this village, Elias had another epiphany. He confronted his own suppressed hatred and anger relative to the injustices his family and fellow Palestinians had suffered at the hands of the Zionists, and knew that he would not make progress, either personally or within this village, if he could not first forgive. With this epiphany came a new resolve. He would not leave in a month.

As Easter season approached, and as Elias and the sisters were able to gain additional trust of the villagers, the Sunday worship service began to grow. The factions, however, remained, pitting households against households and family members against one another. On Palm Sunday, the church was crowded. The two warring factions sat on opposite sides, and, at the end of the service, Elias walked to the doors, closed them and chained them shut. He then told the parishioners that they would not be allowed to leave until they decided to act like Christians and forgive one another. The forgiveness began between two brothers, and soon the entire congregation was singing together. Elias would be staying for a long time to come.



Bridges or Walls

Bridges or Walls Summary and Analysis

The rejuvenation of the congregation was manifested in daily food gifts to the door of Elias' small residence and renovation of the church itself by volunteers. Elias continued to visit homes every day, talking the sisters into visiting Muslim women as well, and soon word spread. Neighboring villages were asking for nuns to come there, too. The three sisters started a kindergarten for all village children, no matter what their religious faith. Huge progress was made and, in the midst of it, Elias is summoned by the Bishop.

The Bishop had decided to send Elias to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem to study the Old Testament. Angry and dismayed, Elias begged for more time in Ibillin, to no avail. Grudgingly, he set up a church council to govern in his absence and left for Jerusalem. It was 1967, and Israel was not a unified, idyllic Jewish nation. Conservatives, moderates, and liberal Jews fought for political power; the economy was faltering, and the growing Arab threat from neighboring countries was growing. There was pressure on Israel from the United Nations to either allow the refugees back into their villages or pay them for their lost land. The more militant Zionists prevailed and refused to do so. In angry retaliation, Egypt blocked the only Israeli port, cutting off its source of trade. Israel bombed air force bases of Egypt and neighboring Arab countries, an event that became known as "The Six-Day War," with Israel the victor. Christians in Israel celebrated with the Jews, much to Elias' dismay. How could Christians celebrate actions that killed innocent people?

Students at the University of Jerusalem were stimulating, and Elias was treated well by professors also. As well, he found some allies who believed that Israel should be open to all three religious groups, and that Arabs and Jews could live together peacefully. Unfortunately, the Fedayeen continued its raids, gathered strength, and united into the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), lead by Yasser Ararat. As Elias completed his studies and returned to Ibillin, he wondered about the recently-appointed, new Bishop, Joseph Raya.

Bishop Raya was a surprise. From America, he was experienced in causes, having served in the deep south during the civil rights movement and having been a close friend of Martin Luther King. He brought to Galilee this same fire for equality and justice and was determined to bring it to Palestinian victims as well. He and Elias became fast allies and soon began some of the same activities which had been successful in the quest for African-American rights. The first step was to organize a successful six-month camp-in on the site of destroyed Biram. It had long been abandoned by the Israelis, and, as the camp-in ended, many Palestinians stayed on to rebuild the village, beginning with the church. The subsequent activity was a march to the capitol in the hopes of putting pressure on the Knesset to enact legislation providing relief to the Palestinians. While the Knesset never opened its doors to the demonstrators, and while Prime Minister Golda Meier refused requests for meetings, the march was considered a

success because Jews, Muslims and Druze all participated in large numbers, along with the Christian organizers.



Work, For the Night is Coming

Work, For the Night is Coming Summary and Analysis

Temporarily elated by the success and unity of the march to the Knesset, Elias nevertheless had to face the reality that Palestinians still struggled for basic survival in Israel, with poor housing, inadequate health care, inferior education and only the most menial jobs. Bishop Raya is sympathetic but tells Elias that he will have to get to work on these issues. Elias is overwhelmed. In another village, however, because of Elias' intercession, nuns had moved in to provide health care, parenting instruction and schooling to all children. The villagers were so grateful that they had collected money as a gift to Abuna (Father) Chacour. Rather than take the money, however, Elias returned the gift so that the village could begin the construction of a library and community center.

During this time, Elias was beginning to gain a reputation abroad and soon was the recipient of a number of invitations to speak at churches in Europe and America. As he did, the money and volunteers began to pour in for assistance to Palestinian villages. Community centers were built in a number of additional villages, and Palestinians began to gain the dignity that Chacour knew was the beginning of their path to justice. As the world continued to argue about peace between Israel and its neighboring Arabs, Elias Chacour continued to build. As each community center was opened, he showed the "Diary of Anne Frank," so that Palestinians could gain an understanding of what the Jews had suffered. One of his most acclaimed accomplishments during this time was the establishment of a youth camp in Ibillin, attended by Palestinians of all religious faiths.

Elias continued to speak in Europe. His audiences were told that peacemaking was not a simple task. More than anything, it involved forgiveness and "risking the friendship of your enemies." Riveted by his message and impressed by his accomplishments in Palestinian villages, congregations throughout Europe and North America committed funds and volunteers to assist in the efforts. As Chacour's reputation grew, the Israeli government began to push back, preventing his entry into villages to build and plant and refusing international media access to villages in which renovation and construction had occurred.

Amidst the successes, the political situation was worsening. The murder of eleven Israeli athletes by the Fedayeen during the Munich Olympics and the Israeli aggression into Lebanon in reprisal and to rid the country of PLO operatives, created a more severe situation for Palestinians within Israel itself. "I tried to ignore the government sanctions against us - the land 'reforms' that took away more and more arable land from Palestinian villages, the unwarranted week-long curfews particularly in the West Bank and Gaza at crucial times in the planting or harvesting of crops. In a time of private meditation, another of Jesus' sayings gripped me with force: 'Work, for the night is

coming" (p. 208). And yet, Chacour was ready to quit, tired and discouraged at age forty.

One Link

One Link Summary and Analysis

Chacour was ready to leave Israel and seek a university teaching position in Europe. Returning to Europe for a number of speaking engagements, the offers were numerous, but always, he found a reason to decline. The turning point came during a speech in Germany, when he was informed that hundreds of refugees in two Lebanese camps - Sabra and Shatila - were massacred, under the guise of wiping out the PLO. Women, children and elderly were all killed by Lebanese Christians, as Israeli soldiers circled the camps to keep media and UN peace keepers out. The world demanded an investigation and got it. In the end, Palestinians and Jews mourned the dead together, outraged by the violence and insanity. Holding his dead mother's necklace of doves and fishes, Elias Chacour knew that his life's work remained unfinished in Israel, and he returned without hesitation, to continue the promotion of peace, dignity and unity among all of its peoples.

Abuna Chacour's work continues as he re-builds villages and works toward understanding, forgiveness, and peace among all groups residing in the Middle East.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary and Analysis

In reflecting upon his book, Father Elias Chacour hopes that those who read it will be called in some way to work for justice, not simply discuss it. To him, Jews and Palestinians, be they Muslim or Christian, are truly "blood brothers," and this makes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so horrific. He calls upon Jews to stop killing and taking land in the name of their previous sufferings. He calls upon Palestinians to stop the violence and martyrdom. He calls upon Westerners to stop defining terrorism only in terms of Arabs - there has been plenty of terrorism on both sides, and plenty of terrorism throughout history, often re-defined as heroism.

Chacour calls upon the nations who engage in arms build-ups and proliferation to stop. For both sides in this conflict to have as their goal the obliteration of one another is an insult to God, who only desires reconciliation.



A Hopeful Word After by: David Hazard

A Hopeful Word After by: David Hazard Summary and Analysis

Writing in 2002, a full twenty years after the original publication of the book, Hazard deplores the continued conflict and violence between Arabs and Jews. Elias Chacour's work, however, continues from his office in Ibillin, despite international awards, honors, and invitations to do otherwise. He has become such a figure in the peacemaking process, moreover, that, in 2001, he was named "Man of the Year" in Israel. Chacour's accomplishments since the publication have been significant. He began a high school in Ibillin with eighty Palestinians in 1983, and it has grown to over fifteen-hundred students of all faiths. In 1995, he opened a technical college, and, in 1997, a college of Religious Pluralism. The only Israeli non-Jewish college, the Mar Elias Educational Institution, now has over forty-five hundred students of all religious beliefs.

Following nine-eleven, many Americans began to ask why the Arabs so hated the United States, and the answer has not been pleasant. While American politicians may respond with platitudes, such as "they hate us for our freedom," the true answer has been the continued wholehearted commitment to and support of Israel, turning a "blind eye" to the injustices perpetrated by Israelis against Palestinians—the Israelis continue to absorb their land without compensation, providing no rights in arresting them, violating the Geneva Convention in prison camps, and providing clearly inferior health care to those in refugee camps in Gaza. American media do not report such inhumane treatment, and Arabs are angry that both sides of the conflict are not known, or worse, ignored. For this reasons, they hate and form terrorist groups dedicated to the destruction of Israel and the end of American influence in the area.

Abuna Chacour has not abandoned his hope for eventual peace. Like Hazard, he believes hope lies in individual acts of reconciliation which build upon one another to further justice and peace in the Middle East.



Characters

Elias Chacour

Born in the village of Biram in Palestine, Elias Chacour spent his early years in contentment, the son of Melkite Christian parents who owned a fig orchard and raised their large family in strong faith and the principles of contribution to their society. All of this came to an abrupt end with the arrival of Zionist soldiers who violently forced the villagers to flee to the neighboring destroyed village of Gish. Elias was clearly torn. On one hand, he had been taught to forgive and pray for one's enemies; on the other, he was the victim of a violent movement that had destroyed the life of his family. As he grew and matured, Elias began to establish a very personal relationship with God and Jesus, moving toward a life of religious vocation, being educated first in an orphanage and then seminaries, ultimately becoming ordained in the Melkite Christian Church.

As a priest, Chacour would not choose a pious, contemplative life. Instead, he assumed the pastorship of a decaying church in the decaying village of Ibillin, and, from there, he branched out to the rebuilding of other villages and the restoration of dignity for Palestinian victims of Israeli violence and discrimination. He accomplished this by providing services to villagers of all faiths, building libraries, schools, community centers, and, ultimately, post-secondary institutions, all of them open to all religious faiths.

Chacour's message is peace, justice, and reconciliation, accomplished by individuals, one to another, not by governments that are steeped in politics and stubbornness. He has become an international figure, moreover, with this message and has gained support from Christians, Muslims, and Jews the world over.

Michael Chacour

Father of Elias Chacour, Michael inherited his fig orchards in Biram from his forefathers and was intimately tied to his land, his trees, his heritage, and his family. A deeply religious man, Michael Chacour often recounted the history of Judaism and Christianity, demonstrating always that Jews and Christians were "blood brothers," grafted together by God in reconciliation and peace. As he worked his orchards, Michael served his community as well, saw that his fellow villagers, no matter what their religious belief, were treated with dignity and respect. He raised his children to love God and Jesus, and to understand that they were caretakers of their religion and the land they tended. Above all, Chacour was a man of peace. He lived the Biblical challenge to love and pray for one's enemies. Indeed, as the Zionist soldiers took his beloved orchards and destroyed his village, he preached love and forgiveness; as he and his older sons were taken from Gish and dropped off in unknown territory, he prayed for those who did so. As a realist, Michael knew that his son, Elias, was spiritually inclined and Michael wanted to be certain that Elias received the education and training necessary for a life



of religious vocation. To this end, he advocated for his son, enlisting the support of the Bishop to provide schooling, first at an orphanage, then at seminaries in Palestine and Paris. Michael Chacour rebuilt his life in Gish, even taking employment in his formerly owned orchards, out of love of the land and loyalty to his fellow Palestinians. He took great pride in the accomplishments of his son Elias and participated in many of his peace activities.

Katoub Chacour

Katoub Chacour was a deeply religious Melkite Christian, married to Michael Chacour, with whom she had six children. All of her life, she wore a necklace of doves and fish, her husband's wedding gift. The fish represented "Peter's fish in the nearby Sea of Galilee...and the doves represented the Holy Spirit as it had lighted upon Jesus at His baptism" (pp. 34-35). Unable to read or write, Katoub had memorized the stories of the bible, some word for word, and related them to her children daily. Her love of Jesus was imparted to her children through stories, and, through her, Elias came to see Jesus as a strong, compassionate hero who stood up to the irreligious activities of others while healing the sick and demonstrating love and forgiveness always. It was Katoub who consistently encouraged Elias in his quest to change the lives of Palestinians, urging him to continue through difficult challenges and to most especially work with the young people who needed an earthly hero of their own.

Zionists

Born in the late 1800's in Europe, the Zionists were a militant group of Jews who insisted that it was their destiny to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. To this end, they encouraged Jewish settlement in Palestine, throughout the early 1900's, negotiated agreement for their homeland with Britain and other allies during World War I and World War II, and then moved into Palestine with militias following World War II. In Palestine, they confiscated native Palestinian land, forcibly ousted entire villages, ran Palestinians into refugee camps in neighboring countries, and killed or allowed to be killed thousands of Palestinians, both Christian and Muslim. The Zionists were heavily represented in the early governments of the newly-declared state of Israel, though their influence waned over time.

Abu-E'ed

Abu-E'ed was teacher of the children of Biram. He was a small, bearded and kindly man who obviously loved the children and a priest who loved his church. Because some priests in the Melkite faith were allowed to marry, Abu E'ed had a large family, and became a "father" to all the young children in school. As well, he opened his students to the world outside of Biram, giving a larger view in a village that had no newspaper or radio. With all of his fatherly care, however, Abu-E'ed demanded obedience and quiet in his schoolroom, and the children complied rather than face his retribution.



Faraj Nakhleh

Faraj and Elias met when both were in the orphanage and became very close friends. Both young men chose a life of religious vocation, and, for a while, it appeared that they would serve the Church in the same way. Once they completed their seminary studies in Paris, however, their paths diverged. Faraj chose a more contemplative, quiet life, working among the poor, while Elias chose the more activist role of renovating villages and restoring dignity to his people.

Fedayeen

Organized in the early 1950's, the Fedayeen was a militant Arab organization which operated from countries bordering Israel and conducted violent raids on Israeli settlements. It morphed into the Palestinian Liberation Organization and has been dedicated to the destruction of the state of Israel, in retribution for its treatment of Palestinians.

Lord Balfour

Member of the British Parliament and later the Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour encouraged and supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Israel. He is most famous for his Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which he posited his views on this matter.

Bishop Joseph Raya

Catholic Bishop in America's deep South, Raya was transferred to Palestine and assisted Elias in the organization of peaceful demonstrations on behalf of the Palestinians. He was an early promoter of civil rights in America and friend of Martin Luther King.

David Ben Gurion

Member of the Zionist movement, Ben Gurion became the first Prime Minister of the newly-formed state of Israel in 1948. He was militant and adamant that the Jewish people had the inherent right to claim all land of Palestine as their own, pushing native Palestinians out.

David Hazard

Co-author of *Blood Brothers*, David Hazard is an American journalist who traveled to Israel, met Elias Chacour, and became dedicated to the goals of Palestinian/Jewish reconciliation. He provided a preface and an update to the original publication.



Objects/Places

Biram

Village in Palestine in which Elias Chacour spent his early life. It was destroyed by the Zionists, but, many years later rebuilt by many of the original inhabitants.

Gish

A small village in Palestine, destroyed by the Zionists, to which the villagers of Biram fled when ousted from their village.

Irgun

A radical Zionist organization who conducted terrorist activities against the British and then the native Palestinians in the late 1940's.

Melkite Christianity

One of the original Christian groups who followed the teaching of Jesus literally and refused to change after the deaths of the Apostles brought fragmentation to Christianity.

kibbutz

A collective farming community in Israel. These were established by Jews as they emigrated to Palestine following World War II.

Beatitudes

Words of Jesus spoken in Galilee and the favorite New Testament passage of Elias' mother. They begin with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" and are found in the sixth chapter of Matthew.

St. Joseph's Minor Seminary

Seminary in Nazareth to which Elias and Faraj transferred when their schooling at the orphanage was completed. This was the place of initial training for priests.



St. Sulpice

A seminary in Paris to which Elias and Faraj were transferred from St. Josephs. The transfer to this seminary occurred because the normal seminary in Jerusalem would not admit Palestinians.

Sabra and Shatila

Two refugee camps in which exiled Palestinians lived and which were the site of massacres of hundreds of Palestinians.

Ibillin

Elias' first assignment upon completion of his education. Initially an eroded village, it has become a model town for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence of Christian, Jew and Muslim.

Gaza

A strip of land on the Mediterranean Sea bordering Israel but controlled by Arabs.



Themes

Terrorism is Relative

Terrorism is most often defined as violence, or the threat of violence, on the part of a group, usually non-governmental, in order to promote fear and to coerce other groups or governments into political change. Given this definition, we need to expand the labeling of groups as terrorists and examine, from an historical perspective, our own use of the term. In fact, the term "terrorism" connotes extreme negative activity in which violent militants kill and destroy to achieve their purposes. Contemporary western society thus labels Arab militant groups, specifically, the PLO, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban as terrorists, and, indeed, they fit the definition. What we tend not to label as "terrorist" are those same activities which are carried out for causes we believe to be "good." Thus, American revolutionaries become heroes to us but terrorists to the British Empire of the time. Castro and his guerrilla terrorist tactics made him a "hero" until we learned that he was a Communist, at which point his activities to promote Communism in Latin America became "terrorist." Zionists, in their successful confiscation of Palestinian land and the "terrorizing" and killing of native Palestinians, were nationalist leaders. The Fedayeen, who responded in kind, however, were terrorists. The point is clear. In a world of divergent political, economic, and social forces, individual and national definitions of terrorism are far more a matter of convenience and opinion than are they an objective approach to the concept that all killing, destruction, and other violence is rooted in terrorism.

Historical Bias

Students of history are certainly aware that textbooks, media outlets, and other sources of information carry with them a certain amount of bias and propaganda. Thus, American depiction of major historical events have been and will continue to be reported from an American perspective, while reporting in other regions of the world may depict decidedly different viewpoints. Blood Brothers uses the background of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East to point to this prevalent bias. During the time of Jewish settlement in Palestine and continuing through the declaration of the state of Israel and the consequential conflict and violence, America has reported on these events from a rather transparent pro-Israeli perspective. The reasons are well known: America needs a strong ally in the Middle East, and we have an abiding interest in the availability of oil from that region. What Chacour clearly points out, however, is that American history sources fail to report the Palestinian perspective during these years of Jewish settlement and takeover, and the horrible injustices and violence inflicted upon native Palestinians as the Zionists moved in. Today, as well, America is not prone to declare that Arab terrorists hate us because we are encroachers in their land, and largely motivated by imperialistic endeavors. Rather, they supposedly "hate us for our freedom." This bias is not an isolated incident, moreover, and certainly not only



characteristic of the United States. Each nation, in order to promote its legacy and current political and world views, engages in historical bias.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation, whether personal or public, involves the re-establishment of a peaceful, compatible relationship from former enemies or combatants. Blood Brothers is, above all, the story of one man's efforts to bring about reconciliation among the peoples of the Middle East, and specifically between Palestinians and Jews in the state of Israel. Reconciliation must begin, according to Chacour, within oneself, in the form of genuine forgiveness and the love for one's enemy that Jesus counseled. First, then, Elias had to reconcile the ambivalence toward the teachings of his parents and Jesus and his anger over the injustices heaped upon his people, for which he could glean no Godly purpose. Still, once he had reconciled his own emotions, he was able to move forward in pursuit of the reconciliation of others, and, moreover, take active steps in this process. He then expands this notion of reconciliation toward the larger world, positing that reconciliation of all peoples can occur, one individual at a time and, in the end, be a more permanent reconciliation than the shaky alliances of nations that continue to mistrust and threaten one another. Indeed, he calls upon all people and all governments to stop the madness, to step back, and contemplate what they might do to promote peace and reconciliation so the planet survives.



Style

Perspective

The author's perspective is key to this work. Written in the first person narrative, the story of Palestine following World War II is told by one who experienced first hand the harshness and cruelty of discrimination, hatred and violence. As a Palestinian Christian, whose early life was filled with peaceful co-existence of all native cultures and religions, Elias Chacour recounts a very different view of the establishment of the state of Israel than most Westerners have been given through their history texts and politicians of that time. The world view, certainly colored by empathy and sympathy for the Jewish people and their suffering in Europe during World War II, has been that the Jews migrated to Palestine to form a homeland, characterized by democracy, tolerance and peace. The fact that they were opposed by Arabs in this quest, despite world support and legitimacy, has painted the Arabs as the villains, using terror to destroy a democratic ally in the Middle East. Elias Chacour is neither Muslim nor Jew - he is a Christian who felt the brunt of Zionist militaristic confiscation of native Palestinian land, cruelty, murder, and discrimination. His story allows the contemporary student of the Middle East much greater understanding of the current Arab position against Israel, and the injustices suffered by both Christian and Muslim Palestinians. Unlike Arab terrorists, however, Chacour has determined to work toward reconciliation and justice, by bringing dignity to his Palestinian people, no matter what their religious affiliation, so that Jews, Muslims, and Christians may find common ground and understanding and put away the hatreds and violence of the past sixty years. His belief is that this reconciliation will not occur at the governmental level, but, rather, by the gradual reconciliation of individuals, growing into a groundswell of pressure for peace and justice.

Tone

Identifying an overriding tone for *Blood Brothers* is a bit difficult, for, even within Elias Chacour himself, the emotions range from anger and bitterness to love and forgiveness. As a child, taught by his parents to forgive and love one's enemies as Jesus did, Elias has difficulty reconciling these principles with the events of his young life, resulting in the confiscation of his family's orchards, the eviction from their village, and pervasive injustice inflicted upon native Palestinians as the state of Israel was formed. At the same time, as he researched the history of the Zionist movement, he began to understand that not all Jews, and certainly not those who had originally lived in Palestine, adopted the views and practices of the Zionists who had come to control Israel. Reconciling the ambivalence that he felt toward both Jews and Palestinian militants became a critical journey that he had to take as he grew spiritually and intellectually. Ultimately, the tone moves to reconciliation and love, as Chacour comes to understand that the only path to peace and justice lies within the spirits of the young, who must be brought together in cooperation and commitment to mutual goals of peace, equality and justice. In the



reconciliation of one soul at a time, he believes, lies the peaceful future of the Middle East.

Structure

Blood Brothers is largely a chronological story of the life of Father Elias Chacour and, as well, the Palestinian issue, as it relates to the entire volatility of the Middle East. The organizational structure, then, begins with the early childhood of Elias in the small village of Biram, in Galilee, and continues through his personal experiences as a victim of the Zionist forces and their claim to Palestine. From there, the focus remains on this young man's spiritual journey through his study in seminaries and, ultimately, his ordination and ensuing work to rebuild Palestinian villages and reconcile the variety of ethnic and religious groups in Israel. A break in this chronological framework occurs, however, as Chacour launches into a study of the history of Zionism and its activities leading up to the establishment of Israel, and relates this often-ignored movement's "terrorism" and its consequences for the native Palestinians. Originally published in 1983, the newer edition (2003) adds epilogues by both Chacour and co-author David Hazard, in order to bring the reader up to date on world events and Chacour's more current activities, as well as to challenge the Western world to analyze its own behaviors as they relate to continued upheaval and violence in the Middle East.



Quotes

"What drove me to completing Blood Brothers was the human drama - the compassion and the rare treasure of peace within Elias Chacour that I wanted to discover for myself. His is a true account that moved me as few before - an account of faith in the midst of indignity, hatred, and violence in the furnace that is the Middle East." (pp. 15-16 - Introduction by David Hazard, American journalist who wrote this autobiography for Elias Chacour)

"Row after row of fig trees spread for several acres, stretching down the hill away from our house, covering the slope with rustling greenery. The broadening leaves concealed a fresh-water spring and a dark, mossy grotto where our goats and cattle sheltered themselves in summer. Beyond our orchards rose the lush majestic highlands of the upper Galilee. They looked purple in the distance - 'the most beautiful land in all of Palestine,' Father said so often. A dreamy look would mist into his pale blue eyes then, as it did whenever he spoke about his beloved land." (p.21)

"There had been trouble in the mid-1930's, before my birth. Father told us there had been opposition to the British who had driven out the Turks and now protected us under a temporary Mandate. Strikes and riots had shaken Jerusalem, Haifa and all of Palestine, but these were quickly quelled. It was just one more incident in the long history of armies that traversed or occupied our land. Then things had settled, so it appeared, into a lull. Soon, it was hoped, the British would establish a free Palestinian government, as they had promised. Without a single radio or newspaper in all Biram - even then, in the late 1940's - we had no inkling that a master plan was already afoot, or that powerful forces in Jerusalem, in continental Europe, in Britain and America were sealing the fate of our small village and all Palestinian people." (p. 25)

"The stories about Jesus were, to me, the most wonderful and alive. Jesus, in my young mind, was a flesh-and-blood hero who may have walked the dusty roads into our own village. Mother said He had come to Galilee first, to our hills and our people, after His temptation in the wilderness. It was from His lips that we first heard the good news: God and man were reconciled. Perhaps some forefather Chacour had eaten bread and fish miraculously multiplied by Jesus' hand. Maybe a Chacour boy or girl felt the brush of His fingertips when He blessed the little children, or watched as He healed the sick and the blind. These wonders were real to me, for they had occurred on streets and in homes like those I saw every day." (p. 34-35)

"What I understood about Jesus, what attracted me, was His strong, sometimes fiery nature; the way He erupted in the temple courts, driving out the greedy merchants and scattering the coins of the moneychangers; His habit of helping the crippled and blind, even if He broke the laws and offended the overly-pious religious leaders. Sometimes I thought He was the only one who could understand a small boy who also threw himself into situations - somewhat blindly - a boy whose tongue sometimes got him into trouble, too, like the time I committed a capital crime in Abu 'Eed's classroom." (p. 37)



"The Zionists were given possession of the majority of Palestine - fifty-four per cent - even though they owned only seven per cent of the land! In five major areas that were being handed over, well over half the people - up to seventy and eighty, even ninety-nine per cent - were Palestinians. The 'compromise' gave the Zionists almost all the fertile land, including the huge, main citrus groves that accounted for most of our people's export income. It gave away the vast Negev region where the Bedouins produced most of the barley and wheat grown in Palestine. There was three times more cultivated land in this one area than the incoming, European settlers had cultivated in all Palestine in the previous thirty years." (p. 46)

"And so, three years after our expulsion from Biram, Father and my brothers were hiring themselves out as laborers - just for the chance to touch and care for Father's beloved trees. I did not know the word irony then, but I could understand pain." (p. 71)

"Now I thought I understood the longing for solitude that had become so clear in Haifa. It was not a call to abandon humanity - but a heart cry to stand alone before God. And alone with Him I could find perfect serenity. It was so comforting,. Surely this was what Father had intended when he first sent me off to be trained by the Bishop. For me, the service was over too soon. I wanted to bask in the stillness forever." (p. 99)

"All this added to my continued inner conflicts. I wished I could remain serene - aloof and undisturbed by worldly conflicts as was Father, as were Faraj and the brothers of St. Joseph's. It did not occur to me then that my unquiet heart was not a bad thing. It was like a delicate balance that had been forcefully tipped and wanted righting. It produced in me a drive - like a hunger - that would carry me to the fiery heart of our land's vast conflict." (p. 105)

"Unfortunately, we were to learn that Palestinians, indeed, had been branded as ignorant, hostile, and violent. And now, with no flag, no honor and no voice to shout our defense to the opinion-fashioning world press, the reputation of our ancient people had degenerated to the status of non-persons. We were the outcasts." (p. 114)

"To me, these terrified masses of Jewish immigrants were never to blame for our tragedy. They were dazed by fear, pathetically desperate to escape the heinous death camps. In this they were to become the pawns of the Zionist leaders. Upon their arrival in Palestine they were quickly indoctrinated against their so-called new enemy - the Palestinians." (pp. 129-130)

"How terribly sad that men could ignore God's plan for peace between divided brothers, even supporting one group as it wielded its might to force out the other. Such wrong thinking had divided the early Church, driving Hebrew and Gentile believers apart. I had been surprised at fellow seminarians and professors. They had often become furious in discussions when I had stated that Palestinians also had a God-given right to live in Israel, to sow and reap from the land, and to live as equals, not second-class citizens. Were we not 'children of the promise, regarded as Abraham's offspring?'" (p. 145)



"As I drove, the voices of the ancient prophets still sounded. I found myself in hot debate, almost firing questions back at them. To me, as a Palestinian, Israel had returned to the land not in righteousness, but as my oppressor. As a Christian, I knew that I was grafted spiritually into the true family of Israel - though it certainly had not kept me for my people from suffering injustice. And how was I to respond? As a Christian, I had just as difficult a calling as a blood son of Israel. I could not join with the violent bands who were now attacking the country, even though I could feel their frustration. But neither could I live by the passive ways of Father and the other elders. Was my refusal to lay down and be trampled, to see our young people denied education, good jobs and decent homes, just my typical stubbornness? Many times I had felt guilty for my feelings, but I could no longer deny them." (p. 150)

"The reason Jesus' words had struck me was this: Suddenly, I knew that the first step toward reconciling Jew and Palestinian was the restoration of human dignity. Justice and righteousness were what I had been hungering and thirsting for: This was the third choice that ran like a straight path between violent opposition and calcified, passive non-resistance. If I were really committing my life to carry God's message to my people, I would have to lift up, as Jesus had, the men and women who had been degraded and beaten down. Only by regaining their shattered human dignity could they begin to be reconciled to the Israeli people, whom they saw as their enemies. This, I knew at once, went beyond all claims of land and rightful ownership; it was the true beginning." (pp. 153-154)

"'And,' I insisted, hammering home my points about reconciliation, 'it does no good for you to sympathize with me as a Palestinian if it means that you hate the Jewish people as a result. That's not what I'm here for. We, all of us, have to become the preserving salt of the earth. Do you agree?' I asked, leaning into the microphone." (p. 224)

"I looked at Mother's necklace curled neatly in my palm. Each link was beaten and hand-fitted by some skilled craftsman. I had not fully known about peace before. It was not at all like a slim thread, as I had thought. Peace is like a chain. And every link was important in its rightful place." (p. 227)



Topics for Discussion

Define terrorism. How have Zionist actions in Palestine fit this definition?

Why do you think history textbooks, politicians, and the media in America have not been fully objective on the Palestinian issue?

Chacour has difficulty reconciling an important paradox. Following the Holocaust, as many Jews emigrated to Palestine, Zionist leaders and armies perpetrated many of the same atrocities. What were those atrocities and how were they rationalized?

Chacour's personal spiritual journey led him to what conclusions about the potential for reconciliation among Jews, Christians and Muslims in Palestine?

Jesus is Chacour's obvious hero. In what ways have Chacour's beliefs and actions emulated Jesus?

Chacour appears to be a blend of the personalities of both his mother and father. What did he absorb from each of them that molded the adult he became?

Abuna Chacour continues to pursue "justice, reconciliation and dignity." How does he define each of these terms?