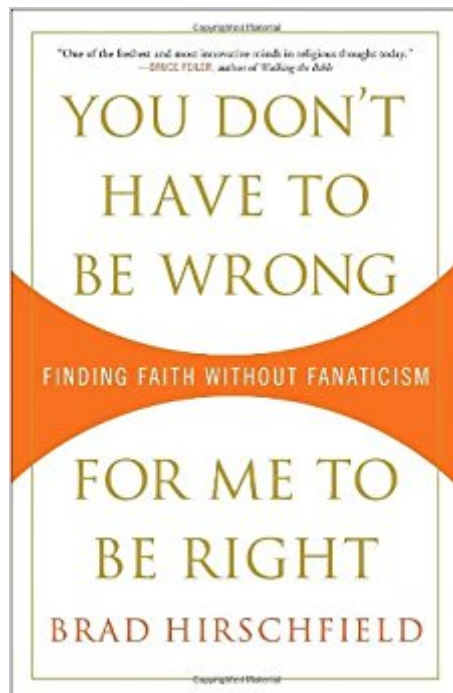


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You Don't Have To Be Wrong For Me To Be Right: Finding Faith Without Fanaticism



Synopsis

Conflict is an opportunity to learn and growâ “and often to grow closer to one another. Brad Hirschfield knows what it means to be a fanatic; he was one. A former activist in the West Bank, he was committed to reconstructing the Jewish state within its biblical borders. Now he is devoted to teaching inclusiveness, celebrating diversity, and delivering a message of acceptance. In *You Don't Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right*, Rabbi Hirschfield uses his own spiritual journey to help people of all faiths find acceptance and tolerance, as well as a path to peace, understanding, and hope that will appeal to the common wisdom of all religions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This timely and extremely important book shows us the way to a dialogue that goes beyond the old zero-sum games. The book is subtitled "Finding Faith Without Fanaticism," and Hirschfield -- a Rabbi and former gun-carrying member of the extremist wing of Israel's settler movement -- speaks with authority about his personal epiphany. It is easy to be pluralistic and believe in dialogue when one is an oppressed minority, staring at the barrel of a gun. But to have one's finger on the trigger and reach the same conclusion is rare, and far more compelling. Hirschfield powerfully describes his experiences and the alternative path he chose to pursue. The remainder of the book elaborates on Hirschfield's central insight: that oftentimes we gain nearly as much from recognizing what we have in common as we do from debating our differences. Like many of our greatest teachers, Hirschfield imparts this lesson through an engaging combination of philosophical analysis, personal stories, and close and innovative reading of traditional Biblical texts. We follow Hirschfield as he travels to

places where his views are presumably unwelcome -- to Berlin, to Moscow, to Fez, Morocco -- and learn from watching his examples. The book's lessons are not reserved for geopolitics. Hirschfield writes persuasively and easily about interpersonal relationships as well, sharing stories from his own life, from Adam and Eve, and from The Cosby Show. Nor is the book's message concealed behind academic jargon. To the contrary: Hirschfield's writing is refreshingly conversational, casual without being dumbed-down. Ultimately, the import of this book lies in the insight that there's more to being right than proving another wrong. It is a powerful affirmation that truth can be absolute -- real truth, not a watered-down simulacrum called "truth" -- but it need not be absolutist.

Being to the "right" of the author (both religiously and politically), I anticipated another in a line of Shalom Auslander- Richard Dawkins-Christopher Hitchens anti-religious rant against those who are orthodox in their beliefs. Surprisingly, Hirschfield actually validates those who believe, in all forms and ideals. What is new and even refreshing is the lessons he brings from a life of open voyage. Truthfully, we can find disagreement on the issues of intermarriage as well as eating lobster on shabbos- but I think Hirschfield would have it no other way. Towards the end of the book, when Brad writes "idealism is a part of faith, or perhaps faith is the ultimate expression of idealism", he encapsulates the essence of belief and religion for so many. The striving for unprovable understanding, grasping the intangible. Simply, a must read philosophical treatise in under 250 pages.

Rabbi Hirschfield has written a highly accessible and personal account of the hard-learned lesson that one can have a deep and abiding faith WITHOUT the necessity of losing one's ability to maintain what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has termed "the Dignity of Difference"--i.e. the ability to respect the possibility that an other can have legitimate faith and access to truth as well. This is an incredibly important lesson for our time. At a time in world history in which the secular pursuit of truth that has dominated the Western world for the past 400+ years is not yielding the promised fruit, and people are turning back to the faith traditions for ultimate answers to the questions of "Why?" and "Who am I?" (ie. questions of meaning and identity, respectively), there is a burning need to recognize and develop the positive values of religion and belief for humankind, and to minimize the risk of faith-driven mutually assured destruction. For, as Chief Rabbi Sacks has pointed out, the greatest and most powerful weapon of mass destruction is the human mind. And yet, at the same time, it is also the most powerful engine of hope for humanity.

In a day and age of increased faith and increased fanaticism, Brad Hirschfield has charted a course that allows for all of the positives of a faith-based life, while resisting extremism that in so many parts of the world appear to be linked to faith. Brad uses his personal experiences as a window for the rest of us to view these issues. It doesn't provide any easy answers - but it does help promote a thought process to both engage those whose views might be considered "foreign" to our own, while not permitting engagement to constitute approval at all times. It is a difficult, but based on Brad's book, possible, process.

In the realm of dialogue, where I both study and work, there is a lot of agreement and good feelings. We get together with like minded individuals who have different shades of skins, different gods, different sexual orientations, or nationalities and we all congratulate ourselves on our open spirits. Unfortunately, that's not quite enough. It's not enough because you are preaching to the choir and where the conversation must happen is where you cannot find easy agreement, where you must struggle to deal with difference and must learn to let their "Thou" exist even if it is something you oppose. Rabbi Hirschfield in this book (and even more so if you hear him speak, I recently heard him speak to a crowd at a university that left nary an eye dry) explains how one may live a life and have a conversation that both honors the other and allows you to honor yourself as well. This is an important book, and I hope that those reading it go far beyond those who are normally a part of this conversation.

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