



## Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life

By Sari Nusseibeh, Anthony David

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**A New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice**

A teacher, a scholar, a philosopher, and an eyewitness to history, Sari Nusseibeh is one of our most urgent and articulate authorities on the conflict in the Middle East. From his time teaching side by side with Israelis at the Hebrew University through his appointment by Yasir Arafat to administer the Arab Jerusalem, he has held fast to the principles of freedom and equality for all, and his story dramatizes the consequences of war, partition, and terrorism as few other books have done. *Once Upon a Country* brings rare depth and compassion to the story of his country.

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## **Editorial Review**

### From Publishers Weekly

*Starred Review.* Philosophy professor and political leader Nusseibeh, as the Oxford and Harvard-educated descendant of an ancient and influential Jerusalem family, draws on deep roots in his account of a dramatically displaced life. That's one reason why, despite his relative privilege, his autobiography dovetails persuasively with the larger story of Palestinian dispossession and struggle in the 20th century. Nusseibeh, as a former PLO representative, also has the vantage of a political insider. Equally instructive are his differences from his fellow Palestinians, many of whom he encountered as his students in the classrooms and cafes at Birzeit University in the West Bank, and later as president of Al Quds University in Jerusalem. These interactions, among others, give shape to the story of this curious but reticent loner's immersion into national politics, which is overshadowed by the memory of his father (a fiercely independent former Jordanian minister and governor of Jerusalem). In relating the Palestinian perspective on the expulsions, expropriations and deprivations during and after the wars of 1948, 1967 and beyond, Nusseibeh convincingly interweaves personal experience and tectonic historical shifts, while charting his own political evolution and eventual and resolute insistence on a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. (Apr.)

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### From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Sari Nusseibeh is the ultimate insider, and he draws on that vast experience to shed light on the prospects for peace in the Middle East. He patiently examines complex issues and offers enough nuances to please readers who want to understand the ongoing conflict on a deeper level. The author's relatively evenhanded stance (despite a less-than-flattering portrayal of former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, as well as some contested historical details) distinguishes *Once Upon a Country* from other, more agenda-driven efforts, as does its call for nonviolent resolution and compromise. Nusseibeh, echoing Voltaire's notion that "the wisest course of action is surely to tend to your own garden," casts a critical eye on both sides. The result is "a deeply admirable book by a deeply admirable man" (*New York Times Book Review*).

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### From [Booklist](#)

Nusseibeh is head of the only Arab university in Jerusalem. His ancient family roots in Palestine go back 1,300 years. Without histrionics, this detailed insider's account blends Nusseibeh's personal experience as son, husband, father, intellectual, and activist leader with the raging politics of his homeland over the last 40 years. Striving for a two-state solution, he calls for civil disobedience against the Israeli Occupation, never for violence. He is close to the Israeli Peace Now movement, always believing that Palestinians and Jews are natural allies: "Hamas and the Wall both slam the door shut on dialogue." He is unflinching, however, in detailing instances of Israeli torture and children shot dead, and he quotes Sharon's references to creating apartheid-type Bantustan barriers. His campaign against arrests, torture, and expulsions of his people eventually landed him in prison. He recounts his experiences there with sorrow and anger, but also with the bitter humor of the privileged activist under arrest who welcomes the peace of solitary confinement. Anyone concerned with the Middle East will want to read this important and sure-to-be-controversial book. Hazel Rochman

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Raymond Llamas:**

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#### **Kirby Paradiso:**

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#### **Gail Beattie:**

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