

CULTURE

# Finding Solace and Strength in Israel

REVIEW: 'On Democracy and Death Cults: Israel and the Future of Civilization' by Douglas Murray

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I got to know Douglas Murray in the worst week in modern Jewish memory. Hearing him speak was, without question, the best moment in that week, a bright beacon in dark days.

I had been scheduled to speak in October 2023 in a London synagogue, at an event about my recent book. Following the horror of the 7th, with more terrible revelations emerging every day, it was decided to transform the event into a reflection on what had occurred. Douglas was the first asked to speak. Over 10 minutes of astonishing eloquence—in a speech that has been viewed over a million times on YouTube—Douglas told the British Jews assembled in the sanctuary that they were not alone and that there were many around the world who stood with the Jewish people against the barbarians. I will never forget his final words:



I speak for myself when I quote, if I may, in closing, one of my favorite lines in Scripture from the book of Ruth. You all know it. "Whither thou goest, I will go. And where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God." And I tell you this with utter certainty. If they keep coming for the Jews, they keep coming for you: I'll tell you this. They may come for the Zionists. Very well. I am a Zionist. They may keep

coming for the Israelis. Very well. I'm an Israeli. They may come continuously for the Jews. Very well. I'm a Jew. Am Yisrael Chai.

Douglas, of course, is not a Jew; and if one wishes to understand why he so identifies with the Jewish people, they should read his new book, *On Democracy and Death Cults: Israel and the Future of Civilization*. In a certain sense, this work is similar to his previous publications, offering a striking reflection on the future of the West, and on the reluctance of so many to defend its values.

But this moving book is much more, because of its personal nature, giving us a window into the mind, and heart, of a Gentile who has stood with the Jews, and who has spent so much of the last year and a half in the Jewish state. We are with him as he meets bereaved families, when he witnesses the hell on earth that is the remnant of Jewish towns near Gaza; we are with him when he is experiencing an Israeli society at war, and when he is embedded with the Israeli soldiers waging war. We are with him as he sits in the holiday hut that embodies the Jewish festival of Sukkot, and learns from an army source that Yahya Sinwar, mastermind of the October 7 attacks, had been killed. And then, incredibly, we are with him soon after, as he visits the very site where Sinwar breathed his last, and sits in the seat where the monster had spent his final moments on earth, the blood of the villain still on the chair as Douglas reflects on what he sees, and on where he is.

In a sense, the entire book is a meditation on the monstrous mantra that we have heard from terrorists again and again, and which seems to have been first uttered by Hassan Nasrallah in 2004: "We have discovered how to hit the Jews where they are the most vulnerable. The Jews love life, so that is what we shall take away from them. We are going to win, because we love death, and they love life." Throughout, Douglas ponders the death that the terrorists exultantly embrace, and the joy with which they visit death upon men, women, and children. This expressed love of death, he soberly reflects, "seemed to me not just a necrophiliac utterance, but one that appeared almost impossible to counter. How could anyone overcome a movement—a People—who welcomed death, who glorified in death, who worshiped death? Was it not inevitable that against such a force, a feeble and sybaritic West could not possibly win?"

In this book, Douglas provides the answer, revealing to the reader why the Jewish love of life is not a weakness but a strength. Jews do indeed love life—and that is why they have stood as a bulwark for the West where so many other countries have failed:

Of all the soldiers I saw in war, none took delight in their task. They could feel victorious on occasion, proud to have completed a mission and gotten their unit out alive. But from the south of Gaza to the south of Lebanon and the West Bank, none take a joy or pleasure in the task they have to do. They did it, not because they loved death, but exactly because they love life. They fight for life. For the survival of their families, their nation, and their people.

Douglas is aware of the fact that so many do not see Israel, and the Jewish people, with the ardent admiration that he embodies, and he ponders why this is so. Why have woke progressives so eagerly embraced rapists and child-killers as victims, and cast Jews who defend their families as villains? Why has the academy become a fetid swamp of Jew-hate? Why do these students embrace figures and movements that clearly oppose the very "diversity" they claim to ardently admire? *On Democracies and Death Cults* cites the Russian-Jewish writer Vassily Grossman, who argued that anti-Semites take their greatest failings and accuse the Jews of these very violations. Their hatred, Grossman reflects, "is a mirror for the failings of individuals, social structures and State systems. Tell me what you accuse the Jews of—I'll tell you what you're guilty of."

Then, in the book's most brilliant bit, Murray explains that the renewal of anti-Semitism in the academy is linked to their assumption that they, as children of the West, *are themselves guilty*, because they have been taught an anti-American, and anti-Western version of their own history. Thus they apply their own feelings of guilt to the Jews:

A generation has come up that has been taught that by dint of being born into the West, they have been born into countries built on ethnic cleansing and genocide, founded by people who are settler-colonialist racists, and that their societies perpetuate these evils right to this very day. Perhaps the vast rise in antagonism toward Israel is a manifestation of what psychologists call "projection."

How does Grossman's law apply to these people then? Perhaps all that is required is a slight twist to his phrase: "Tell me what you accuse the Jews of—I'll tell you what you *believe* you are guilty of."

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If Israel has emerged from the past terrible year and a half revealing its inner greatness, it is because its young people do not feel guilty about the birth of their country; they are proud of

their modern history and their ancient heritage, and their traditions—teachings that gave so much to the West, which bind them to their land and to each other. Emerging in a pagan world of human sacrifice, the Jews exhorted each other, and the world, to "choose life." It is this verse that Douglas cites, arguing that "there is nothing wrong with loving life so much. It is the basis on which civilization can win." I, for one, feel so blessed that the man whom I saw stand with the Jewish people in a London synagogue now makes this case to the world.

*On Democracy and Death Cults: Israel and the Future of Civilization*

by Douglas Murray

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