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COMMON READS

# First-Year and Common Reading Guide

## The Future Is Peace

*A Shared Journey Across the Holy Land*

by AZIZ ABU SARAH and MAOZ INON

Guide written by Rachael Zafer

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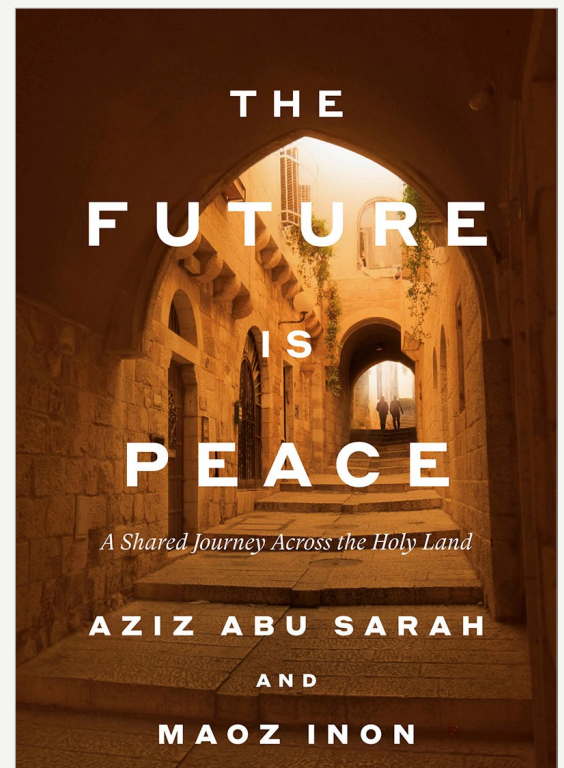
### ABOUT THE BOOK

Palestinian Aziz Abu Sarah and Israeli Maoz Inon forged a bond of brotherhood when the world expected them to be enemies. Both have lost family to the conflict. Both have known the bitterness of righteous anger. Yet, they chose a different path.

In *The Future Is Peace*, Sarah and Inon take readers on a transformative weeklong journey across a sacred and bloodstained land. Facing competing narratives, they explore how compassion and unity can pull humanity back from the precipice of blind hatred. Throughout their travels, they have been constantly asked: In the face of so much loss, how can we ever find hope? Their answer is always the same. One cannot find hope. We must create it.

This book is a rebuttal to a broken world and a bold challenge to the belief that more violence can ever bring security. Told with unflinching honesty, their story is proof that peace is not a naive dream, but a courageous choice—for reconciliation to heal the wounds of revenge, for partnerships to change a destiny of war, and for empathy to save us from drowning in sorrow.

Pairing unapologetic candor and inspirational prose, Sarah and Inon are sending an urgent message that the people have the power to make change. Peace is inevitable. For Palestinians, for Israelis, and for the world that awaits their example, it is not just possible—it is the future.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Aziz Abu Sarah** is Co-CEO of InterAct International, a nonprofit dedicated to Middle East Peace. He is a peacebuilder, entrepreneur, National Geographic Explorer, TED Fellow, and renowned speaker and trainer on conflict resolution and responsible travel. Aziz is the cofounder of MEJDI Tours, a travel company on a mission to transform tourism into a global force of citizen diplomacy. He has won numerous awards, including from the United Nations, Institute of International Education, and The Explorers Club. Aziz is consistently named one of the world's 500 most influential Muslims by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre in Jordan. He has written opinion pieces for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Al-Quds*, and *Haaretz*.

**Maoz Inon** is Co-CEO of InterAct International, a nonprofit dedicated to Middle East Peace. He is an Israeli peace activist and entrepreneur. He was honored with the prestigious Franco-German Human Rights Prize and the Shared Living Award from Abraham Initiatives. He has spoken on Capitol Hill, at U.S. universities, and the European Parliament. He has written pieces for *The Washington Post*, *Al Jazeera*, *Haaretz*, and more. He has founded several peace-focused initiatives within Israel and the Middle East, including the Jesus Trail, Fauzi Azar Inn, and Abraham Hostel & Tour brands.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your understanding of the conflict between Israel and Palestine prior to reading *The Future Is Peace*? What were some of the media sources that shaped your perspective? How did your relationship to your community, your family, or your faith shape your opinions? What assumptions did you previously hold that the book complicated, confirmed, or challenged?
2. How were Aziz and Maoz able to build a close friendship across a divide that often produces enemies? What specific moments demonstrate how they practiced vulnerability in their relationship? How did their shared experience of losing loved ones shape their ability to listen to one another? In your own life, when have you witnessed loss either deepen a connection or create a divide?
3. Each of the cities on Aziz and Maoz's journey hold different stories for Palestinians and Israelis. How do the authors model telling dual narratives of the same place without erasing or flattening the other's perspective? Where do you see tension between their accounts and where do you see meaningful convergence? Consider a place you call home. Whose stories are frequently told and who are the storytellers? Whose stories are often missing or marginalized?
4. What are some of the stories that Maoz learned about Zionism from his parents and grandparents? What did Aziz grow up learning about the occupation and the Nakba? What do Aziz and Maoz experience when

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- travel, education, and relationships complicate the stories they inherited? Have you ever had to rethink a story you were taught about your country, your community, or your family? What helped you hold more than one truth at the same time?
5. What did Aziz and Maoz learn by visiting sites of pain and suffering? Why do they see peace as the only moral response to violence? What are some of the sacrifices that Aziz and Maoz had to make to be peacemakers? How did they navigate the complexities of having supportive family members who also shared real concerns for their safety and wellbeing?
  6. What are some examples of how the “architecture of occupation” (which includes checkpoints, permits, walls, and restrictions) impacts the daily lives of Palestinians? How does this vary across the region? In what ways does this same architecture create a sense of security for many Israelis? What are some of the surveillance and bureaucratic systems that exist in your community? How are different members of your community impacted by these structures?
  7. Many of the sites that Aziz and Maoz explored are sacred to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, yet are also symbolic of conflict in the region. How do they use religious and spiritual stories to deepen understanding of these sites? Where do you see religious language or symbolism in the book being used to justify violence or division, and where is it a call for compassion? How has your own religious, spiritual, or philosophical background shaped the way you think about forgiveness and justice?
  8. Why was Maoz drawn to Nazareth and Beit Fauzi Azar as a location for a guesthouse? What steps did he take to build relationships with Odette Azar Shomar and his Palestinian neighbors? How was he able to cultivate a sense of belonging in the community? What are some ways that you’ve witnessed people in your community building trust with each other? How can relationships be strengthened when trust is challenged or begins to erode?
  9. How do poems, stories, and other forms of creative expression in *The Future Is Peace* convey truths that political and historical accounts might not? Which metaphor or scene did you find the most memorable, and why? In your life, has a work of art ever shifted your view on a political or moral issue?
  10. How does Aziz’s identity as a Palestinian shape his experience at Yad Vashem, a Holocaust memorial site in Jerusalem? What emotional and political tensions does he experience there? How do some Israelis in the book respond when they begin learning about the Nakba and Palestinian sites of loss? What are some other examples of communities that have learned about and acknowledged each other’s painful histories?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

11. What are some ways that the authors demonstrate how hosting, guiding, and traveling through conflict zones can be a tool for transformation for both visitors and locals? What are some of the limitations of doing this work within the tourism industry? Have you had an experience with travel or hosting a visitor that significantly changed how you saw another culture, group, or issue?
12. Throughout the book there are many stories of resilience, cooperation, and connection. What is an interaction in the text that stood out to you as an example of peace in action? What similarities did you notice between the activists, doctors, rabbis, imams, business owners, and families who resisted the status quo while committing to peace? What is a small act of kindness that helped you feel a sense of belonging in your community?
13. Aziz and Maoz insist that we must seek peace in our hearts and minds while working to build peace in the world. How do they each experience the emotional toll of peace work? What practices, people, or beliefs helped them navigate their grief, rage, and exhaustion? When you encounter conflict or violence, what are your default reactions? What practices, resources, teachers, or guides can help you stay engaged while cultivating internal peace?
14. The book ends with a vision for the future that imagines land, relationships, and communities on the other side of conflict. How do Aziz and Maoz balance realism with visionary thinking when engaging with ideas about the region's future? Consider what a peaceful future would look like in your community. What harms would be healed? What repair practices would exist? How would differences be resolved?
15. How has your view of the conflict between Israel and Palestine changed after reading this book? What perspectives or narratives challenged or expanded your thinking? What actions can you commit to taking in order to deepen your understanding of this conflict? How can you actively practice empathy, listening, and respectful dialogue when engaging with people who hold different perspectives from your own?
16. How can understanding global conflicts help you better understand tensions or divisions in your community, country, and relationships? What similarities or patterns do you notice in how power dynamics, identity, history, and misunderstandings shape conflict? What practical tools, communication strategies, or approaches to repair from the book can you apply in your own life moving forward? How might these tools help you navigate disagreements more thoughtfully and constructively?

**CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES****VISUAL MAP**

Create a visual map for the key sites on Aziz and Maoz's journey. Have students work in pairs or small groups and assign each group a site from the book (e.g. Jaffa and Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nazareth, Gaza). Each group should create a visual presentation of the current physical features of the city, including holy sites, markets, walls, checkpoints, and homes. Groups should also include what meaning each place holds for Aziz and for Maoz, in addition to any questions they have about the site. Have each group present their maps and discuss the visual overlaps, contradictions, and complexities that exist in the region.

**CONFLICT IN THE MEDIA**

Choose a three-week period of current media coverage, either on Israel and Palestine or on a domestic or local conflict of your choosing. Use at least three or more news outlets with differing perspectives and compare headlines, images, and language choices across sources, paying close attention to framing and tone. Whose voices and perspectives are centered, and whose are missing? Where do you notice coverage that is one-sided and where do you see complexity or nuance? Is there any mention of peacebuilding? What additional perspectives would help critique, challenge, or deepen these narratives?

**ART AS RESISTANCE**

Explore how Israeli and Palestinian artists share different perspectives on conflict in the region through creative expression. In small groups, have students choose a medium (such as poetry, murals, or song) and learn more about how artists have used the medium to resist oppression and violence. Students should explore how individual artists have taken risks to express their opinions, and what recognition and opposition they have faced. Invite each group to present on one Israeli artist and one Palestinian artist to the larger group.

**DESIGN A PEACE TOUR**

Inspired by Aziz and Maoz's travels, imagine that you are designing a community tour that explores local history, conflict, and lived experiences. Assign small groups of students a landmark with cultural or historical significance to develop as a stop on the tour. Students should identify one to two speakers, key facts, stories, viewpoints, and tensions that help explain the site's significance. Students should present their tour stops, explaining how they selected the people, perspectives, and information they included. As a large group, evaluate the tour and discuss whether or not it reflects the full diversity and complexity of the community. Whose stories are centered, and whose are left out? What revisions or additions are needed to create a more inclusive and balanced portrayal of the community's history and present-day realities?

**CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES****RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES****THEMES IN CULTURE**

Explore how the themes of hope, forgiveness, and revenge are expressed across music, films, and literature. Divide students into small groups and assign each group one of the three themes. Each group will curate a playlist of at least three to five cultural works (songs, movies, books, or other media) and one or more key figure (real or fictional) that represents their theme. Have groups present their selections to the class and discuss the similarities and differences that emerged in how each theme is portrayed in modern culture.

**LOOK TO THE RECENT PAST**

Research the reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts that followed one of the recent global conflicts referenced in *The Future Is Peace*: the end of apartheid in South Africa, Northern Ireland's Good Friday Agreement, or the end of genocide in Rwanda. Consider the following questions:

- What were the conditions that made negotiations for peace possible? Who was involved in these conversations?
- How were peace, accountability, and reconciliation defined in practice?
- What roles did community members, faith leaders, bereaved families, and educators play in these efforts?
- What learnings might be applicable for people working for peace between Israel and Palestine?

**PERSPECTIVES ON REVENGE**

Research how revenge is portrayed, justified, or condemned in two or more historical, biblical, or modern texts (such as religious scriptures, philosophical writings, literature, or contemporary speeches). Respond to the following prompts:

- What reasons are given for supporting or rejecting revenge? What is the relationship between revenge and justice, morality, and/or honor?
- Is seeking revenge ever permitted? Are there limits, rules, or consequences associated with it?
- What alternatives to revenge (such as forgiveness, justice, and/or reconciliation) are presented?
- How might the ideas in these texts apply to modern conflicts or personal disputes today?

**INTERNATIONAL LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Research how international law and human rights organizations describe the current realities in Gaza and the West Bank. Select two international

## RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

law organizations and two major human rights organizations and explore:

- How do they define occupation, apartheid, and genocide?
- What arguments do different legal experts make about whether these labels are appropriate?
- How do these frameworks compare with the language used by Aziz and Maoz?
- Where do you see opposing viewpoints in legal and human rights analyses?

### FRUIT FOR THE FUTURE

Many of the trees, plants, and fruits that the authors write about represent both a literal investment in the land and a symbol of hope for the future. Choose one of the fruits shared in the text (such as carob, olive, sabra, or fig) and learn more about its significance to the region, including:

- Its historical and cultural significance for Palestinians and for Israelis
- How it appears in religious texts, literature, or art across traditions
- How climate change, water scarcity, and ongoing conflict are affecting its cultivation today
- Any peacebuilding or community projects that feature this fruit

### CONFEDERATION

Learn more about Confederation, a proposed resolution for resolving conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Start by exploring key components of Confederation at [alandforall.us](http://alandforall.us).

- How does the Confederation model address issues of security, the economy, natural resources, refugees, and Jerusalem?
- How does the Confederation model address Palestinians' right to return?
- What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of this framework?

## SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

### SUPPORT DISPLACED COMMUNITIES

Learn more about how your city, county, or campus supports refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people. Identify a local or regional organization and volunteer your time or your skills. You might provide in-person support with tutoring, language study, childcare, or transportation or provide virtual support with communications, fundraising, or raising awareness about a local campaign.

## SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

### **PEACE IS AN ACTION**

Inspired by Aziz and Maoz’s belief that peace is an action, create a “30 Days of Peace” challenge for your class or campus. Generate a menu of actions, which might include things like listening to someone you disagree with, learning a new perspective, volunteering with a local organization, or contacting your representatives. Ask participants to take daily actions for 30 days and track their efforts. Host a celebration at the end of the challenge where participants share one reflection of what they learned.

### **ART FOR PEACE**

Inspired by the poetry, murals, and art in *The Future Is Peace*, organize an “Art for Peace” event. Invite participants to create visual art, poetry, music, or dance that addresses local or global conflict. Share work publicly in a gallery exhibition, zine, website, or performance, and include artist statements that connect pieces to themes from the book.

### **BUILDING BRIDGES**

Partner with two or more local faith communities to host a joint event on shared values around conflict, justice, and peace. Invite speakers to share a teaching from their tradition alongside stories from *The Future Is Peace*. Include a shared meal and discussion prompts for participants to reflect on their relationship to peacebuilding.

## RESOURCES

TED: “A Palestinian and an Israeli, face to face”

[prhlink.com/tedpeace](https://prhlink.com/tedpeace)

Dual Narrative Education Center

[prhlink.com/dualnarrative](https://prhlink.com/dualnarrative)

Alliance for Middle East Peace

[www.allmep.org](http://www.allmep.org)

Parents Circle – Families Forum

[prhlink.com/parentsircle](https://prhlink.com/parentsircle)

It’s Time

[prhlink.com/itstime](https://prhlink.com/itstime)

Combatants for Peace

[www.cfpeace.org](http://www.cfpeace.org)

Women Wage Peace

[www.womenwagepeace.org.il/en](http://www.womenwagepeace.org.il/en)

Breaking the Silence

[www.breakingthesilence.org.il](http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il)

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE'S WRITER

Rachael Zafer is a writer, educator, and social change consultant. Rachael provides creative and technical consulting to nonprofits and institutions across the country and has led hundreds of classes and workshops in prisons and jails in Michigan, Illinois, New York, and Colorado. Rachael is the author of discussion guides for two dozen books, including *The Sum of Us* by Heather McGhee, *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson, and *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi. You can view her discussion guides at [www.rachaelzafer.com](http://www.rachaelzafer.com).



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