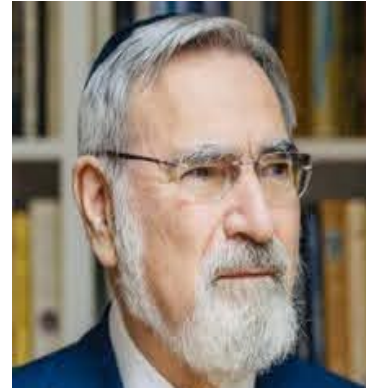




A Tribute To Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l: 7 Lessons From His Life and Teachings



Rabbi Avraham Wein
Congregation Beth Sholom



Aryeh Lebowitz

@bknwrabbi



While the tributes and hespedim for Rav Lord Sacks zt"l have been beautiful and eloquent, most of us find ourselves much more drawn to Rav Sacks' own lectures and writings than to those that are about him.

[#Irreplaceable](#)

Special Sicha:

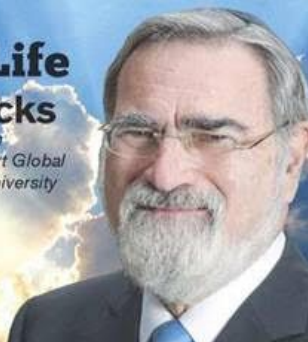
Mending a Broken Life **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Kressel and Ephrat Family University Professor of Jewish Thought, Yeshiva University and Ingeborg and Ira Rennert Global Distinguished Professor of Judaic Thought, New York University

Monday August 31st

12 p.m.

Glueck Beis Medrash



THIS SHABBAT:

PARSHAT KI TEITZEI

Join your Rebbeim and friends as we welcome:



RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future and the Abraham Arbesfeld Kollel Yom Rishon and Millie Arbesfeld Midreshet Yom Rishon present

Judaism's Unique Concept of Freedom



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Kressel and Ephrat Family University Professor of Jewish Thought.

Inspiring The Next Generation

A special morning of practical educational guidance for parents, grandparents and educators



Sunday, December 18th
9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Lampton Auditorium
2540 Amsterdam Ave.
Yeshiva University



KEYNOTE ADDRESS:

**Rabbi Lord
Jonathan Sacks**

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY:

Richard M. Joel ⁶⁸
President
and President-Elect

Experiencing Rabbi Sacks

Accomplishments

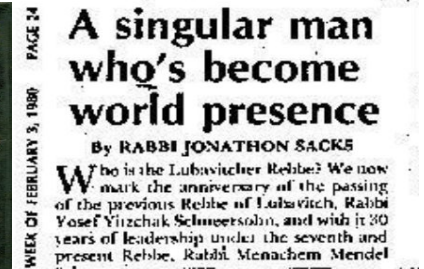
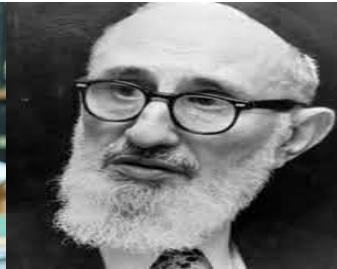
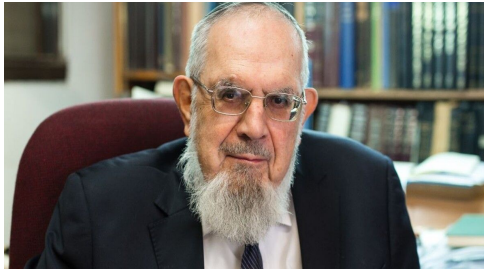
- **Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom (1991-2013)**
- **Published more than 25 Books & Many Articles**
- **Templeton Prize 2016**
- **Was made a Life Peer in House of Lords in 2009**
- **Received Inaugural Norman Lamm Prize in 2010**



Rabbi Sacks' Talents

- If you ever had the privilege to sit in a shul, or a classroom, or an auditorium, filled to the brim with people eager to hear the words of Rabbi Sacks, **then you know what *malchut* [majesty] really is...** To hear Rabbi Sacks speak was sometimes to feel oneself vividly in the presence of something supernatural.- Dr. Samuel Lebens
- **“His prose was remarkable.** With elegant sentences, often short and pithy, replete with wonderful turns of phrase and *bon mots*, he made readers as riveted by his writing as by his oratory”- Dr. David Shatz
(<https://traditiononline.org/the-thought-worlds-of-rabbi-sacks/>)
- “Reading R. Sacks’ many books and listening to his lectures, one is not just impressed by his original insights and striking formulations, but also awed by his **ability to integrate so many disparate sources...** Throughout his writing, Rabbi Sacks quotes broadly from Torah sources. Yet, he also reaches deeply into classical and contemporary writers on philosophy, politics, and society, including popular research in psychology, ethics, economics, and sociology.” - Rabbi Chaim Strauchler

Rabbi Sacks' Mentors



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00PXUuWV5A8&feature=youtu.be>

- On R. Rabinovitch- “He was my Rav, I was his disciple, and I count that one of the greatest blessings of my life.”
- Whether it was the Lubavitcher Rebbe or Rabbi Soloveitchik or my own teacher Rabbi Dr. Nachum Rabinovitch, I have always been drawn to rabbis like Akavia who stood out against the consensus of their contemporaries.
- These were immensely inspiring figures, but what struck me most about them was the **depth of their commitment to real engagement with the world.**

Lesson #1- Caring to Make Change

- ““My friends,” he said, “you’ve all heard of lightbulb jokes. You know what I mean, how many of this kind of person or that kind of person does it take to change a lightbulb. And you have all definitely heard this lightbulb joke — how many therapists does it take to change a lightbulb? Come on, you can all recite the answer along with me — one, but the lightbulb has got to want to change!”- First Kol Nidrei Derasha
 - “Everyone laughed. His message that night was that on Yom Kippur you can change, but you **have to want to change. But that very first line of his Kol Nidre sermon was actually a description of Rabbi Sacks himself.**”- Rabbi Pini Dunner

Caring to Make Change

- The question that haunted me then, and in one form or another has done so ever since, was: **where were the missing Jews?** We who frequented the shul estimated that there were in the region of a thousand Jewish students at the university. Of those, a hundred had some contact with the Jewish society, and perhaps another fifty who attended the Israel society. Where were the missing eighty-five per cent? Why weren't they there?
- In the summer of 1968 I set out on a real journey, to America, to meet as many distinguished rabbis as I could to hear how they understood the Jewish situation of our time...

Caring to Make Change

... the Rebbe patiently answered Jonathan Sacks' questions, but then suddenly reversed roles and began to ask questions of his own. How many Jewish students were there at Cambridge? How many engaged with Jewish life? How many attended synagogue? "Only about 10% of Jewish students are engaged with Jewish life," Sacks responded. "So what are you doing about this," the Rebbe asked. This was unexpected. Rabbi Sacks began to respond. **"In this situation in which I find myself," but the Rebbe let the sentence go no further. "You do not find yourself in a situation," he said. "You put yourself in one. And if you put yourself in one situation, you can put yourself in another."** Rabbi Sacks goes on to explain how it soon became quite clear what the Rebbe was doing. He was **challenging the young Jonathan Sacks to act.** Something was evidently wrong with Jewish life at Cambridge and the Rebbe was encouraging him to get involved, to do something, to change the situation.

Thus over the next five decades Rabbi Sacks simply put has changed the situation.

One Life to Live

- **Use your time well. Life is short, too short to waste** on television, computer games and unnecessary emails; too short to waste on idle gossip, or envying others for what they have, too short for anger and indignation; too short to waste on criticising others. “Teach us to number our days”, says the Psalm, “that we may get a heart of wisdom”. But any day on which you have done some good to someone has not been wasted.
- **Discover meaning.** Take time, once in a while, to ask the Yom Kippur questions, “Why am I here? What do I hope to achieve? How best can I use my gifts? What would I wish to be said about me when I am no longer here?” **Finding meaning is essential to a fulfilled life** – and how will you find it if you never look? If you don’t know where you want to be, you will never get there however fast you run.
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Lesson #2- Being A Mensch

- “Is there no *chulent* today?” he asked, looking perplexed. Sabine hesitated, “it’s not vegetarian.” He paused, and then said “Sabine, Sabine, how could I come to your house and not eat your *chulent*?”.- Rabbi Pini Dunner
- “Because despite all the pomp and ceremony associated with his role, Rabbi Sacks was a mensch.”
- “But perhaps it was because above and beyond anything else, any titles he held, books he wrote or awards he won, he was simply a *mensch*.”- His Employees
- Calling Back Three Times
- Reaching Out To Students

Being A Mensch

- He was the person who **quietly, away from the limelight**, gave so many individuals, groups, rabbonim or organisations who needed it, and needed him, his most precious thing: time, which he did so willingly, unfailingly and consistently.
- He was the person who quietly advised global leaders, helped mediate other peoples' problems and offered endless support and guidance to anyone who asked his advice. And **he was the person who called us when we had personal traumas or issues to deal with**. And called again an hour later to check in. And *again* an hour after that.
- One young rabbi shared that when his father **passed away, the very first phone call he got when he returned from the cemetery was from Rabbi Sacks** who spent time offering comfort and strength. Rabbi Sacks, an introvert by nature who felt more comfortable sequestered in a library than socializing with others, spent countless hours with others lifting spirits, working to free agunos, resolving conflicts, and advocating for the Jewish people. - Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Lesson #3- Importance of Family

Letter #1-Sara, David, I want to talk about children. God has blessed you both with children. They are the joy of our life, as of yours. Enjoy them. Spend time with them. Play, learn, sing, daven and do mitzvot with them. On nothing else will your time be better spent. The love you give them when they are young will stay with them throughout their lives. Like sunshine it will make them flower and grow. Having children is more than a gift. It's **a responsibility. For us as Jews it's the most sacred responsibility there is.**

- **Spend time with your family.** Keep Shabbat, so that there is at least one time a week when you sit down to have a meal together with no distractions – no television, no phone, no email, just being together, talking together, celebrating one another's company. Happy marriages and families need dedicated time.
- Yaakov Avinu was also called Yisrael. In many places, Yaakov represents our Patriarch as a family man, while Yisrael symbolises his leadership of our people, and thus we are called Bnei Yisrael. In this spirit, Rabbi Lord Sacks often spoke to Rabbis about our dual responsibility – as family members and community leaders. He, himself, lived up admirably to this aspiration. - Rabbi Ephraim Mirwis

Lesson #4- Pride in Being Jewish

- One of the greatest gifts you can give your children is to **let them see you carry your identity with pride**. Your mother and I tried to show you as best we could that for us Judaism is our legacy, our stately home, our gift from those who came before us; the greatest attempt in all of history to create a life of justice, compassion and love as a way of bringing the Divine presence down from heaven to earth so that it etches our lives with the soft radiance of eternity. (Letter #1)
- “We are Jews, **heirs of the greatest heritage** ever conferred on a people”- YU Commencement Address
- **Never doubt that it’s a privilege to be a Jew**. Head for head our people have done more to transform the world than any other. There are easier ways to live, but none more challenging. God asks great things of our people. That’s what made our people great. (Letter #3)
- “Judaism is as relevant today as it ever was.”
-

Pride in Being Jewish- Why?

- There are many reasons for the high rates of assimilation in Jewish life, but one is fundamental. **We are heirs to several generations of Jews who were ambivalent about being Jewish.** I don't pass judgment on them, neither should you. Between the 1880s and the 1930s they lived through an age of antisemitism. Then came the Holocaust. Who would blame anyone in those days for saying, as did Heinrich Heine, "Judaism isn't a religion, it's a misfortune". But we are long past those days. **One of the greatest gifts you can give your children is to let them see you carry your identity with pride.**
- The chief rabbi's overall message... was that despite the frightening times we live in, amid the threat of a nuclear Iran and a rise of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiment in Europe, the Jewish people will continue to thrive if we maintain our pride and develop a sense of optimism.- Gary Rosenblatt
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Menachem Butler @MyShtender · 7 Nov



He was one who spent his life searching to best understand and teach Judaism, and in his many roles throughout his career was as a philosopher, writer, editor, 'Rosh Yeshiva', chasid, teacher, rabbi, Chief Rabbi,



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professor, member of the House of Lords, global diplomat for the Jewish People, and teacher of Judaism to the world, including to the Jewish community.

A Unique Time

- While the two extremes are growing, the centre is shrinking. Jews are either drifting away from mainstream synagogues or starting small, new, breakaway communities. Shuls that once brought together Jews from a wide range of commitment are declining. **A certain kind of Jewish identity – proud to be Jewish, proud equally to be an active citizen of the wider society – is waning.**
- Are Jewish faith and practice so fragile that they can only be sustained by being screened from all contact with other cultures? It was once so but it is not so today. **The Jewish situation has changed decisively. Israel exists. Jews have a home. In most countries in the Diaspora, Jews are no longer even the most conspicuous minority. For the first time in four thousand years, Jews have sovereignty and independence in Israel, freedom and equality in the Diaspora. Shall we act as if we were still in the nineteenth century, not the twenty-first?**

Lesson #5- Judaism's Role in the World

- "Be true to your faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith."
- When it comes to moral wisdom, there is no tradition stronger than Judaism. **The voice of Torah is the moral voice of Western civilisation.** It says: Love your neighbour as yourself. It says: Love the stranger for you were once strangers. It says: Justice, justice shall you pursue. It says: Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God. (Letters to the Next Generation, 38)
- So when people worshipped power, **Jews stood up for the powerless.** When societies were rigidly hierarchal, Jews taught that we each have equal dignity. When 90% of Europe was illiterate, Jews built schools to ensure that each of their children had an education. When the vast majority of humanity lived in poverty, Jews practised the principle of tzedakah, the duty of those who have more than they need to share with those who have less. **Judaism is the counter-voice in the human conversation.**

Judaism's Role

- For more than two decades I tried to see whether it was possible to bring a Jewish voice to the public conversation, showing that Judaism has insights, compelling not just to Jews but non-Jews also, into politics, economics, civil society, philosophy, psychology and global ethics. Could we take the best scientific and philosophical wisdom of our time and use it to develop new insights into Torah? Could a religious figure engage in public dialogue with leading intellectuals of the age without being defensive on the one hand, or dismissive on the other? Could you connect leaders of the modern world who happen to be Jews, with their Judaism, getting them to see that their commitments are, whether they know it or not, part of our collective heritage? **I tried these things and found that the answer in each case was Yes**

Lesson #6- Scope of Influence

- I also discovered how enthusiastically young Jews resonate to this message. They want to contribute to the wider society and to humanity as a whole. **They are not inspired by a Judaism that speaks constantly of antisemitism, the Holocaust, the isolation of Israel and the politics of fear. Nor are they inspired by a Judaism that asks them to look down on, and sever all contacts with, the world. Jews are in the forefront of almost every endeavour today.** How transformative it would be if they did so as Jews, ambassadors of the Divine presence, living Jewish lives, energised by Jewish texts, sustained by Jewish prayers, driven to share our legacy of hope. It would be the greatest Kiddush haShem in history.
- Range of Topics
 - Philosophical: Halakhic Mind
 - Major Issues: Anti Semitism, Faith in Humanity, God After the Holocaust, The State of Society
 - Principles of Happiness, Finding Meaning
- Diverse Media
 - Books, Lectures, BBC Interview Specials, Twitter, Whatsapp, Family editions, youtube videos, Pop articles

Lesson #7- The Dignity of Difference

- “The test of faith is whether I can make space for difference. Can I recognise God's image in someone who is not in my image, whose language, faith, ideals are difference from mine? If I cannot, then I have made God in my image instead of allowing him to remake me in His.” The Dignity of Difference p. 201
- **“If we were all the same, we would have nothing unique to contribute, nor anything to learn from others. The more diverse we are, the richer our culture becomes,** and the more expansive our horizons of possibility. But that depends on our willingness to bring our differences as gifts to the common good. It requires integration rather than segregation, and that in turn means that we must have a rich and compelling sense of the common good.”
- Always seek out the friendship of those who are strong where you are weak. None of us has all the virtues. Even a Moses needed an Aaron. The work of a team, a partnership, a collaboration with others who have different gifts or different ways of looking at things, is always greater than any one individual can achieve alone.

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The Dignity of Difference

- To be a Jew is to be an iconoclast, challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of our time, willing to break the idols of the age.
- **Jews were different.** They still are different. **Judaism is about the dignity of difference.** Throughout history Jews were the only people who consistently refused to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the majority faith. Jews were often a minority to teach the world that God cares about the rights of minorities. **And to teach all of us that the majority is not always right, nor is the conventional wisdom always wise.** That has meant that we have often been disliked... But the world needs its dissenting voices – and that is what we are.
- Readers did not always agree with R. Sacks' views and arguments. He at times endured strident criticism, whether from the left or from the right. **But this is exactly what his philosophy urges us to welcome:** conversation, disagreement and difference, albeit, decidedly, without the stridency.- Dr. David Shatz

Difference in Modern Culture

He is equally unimpressed by “no-platforming” in our universities, where those whose views don’t fit specific groups’ notions of what is acceptable are banned for speaking on campus..

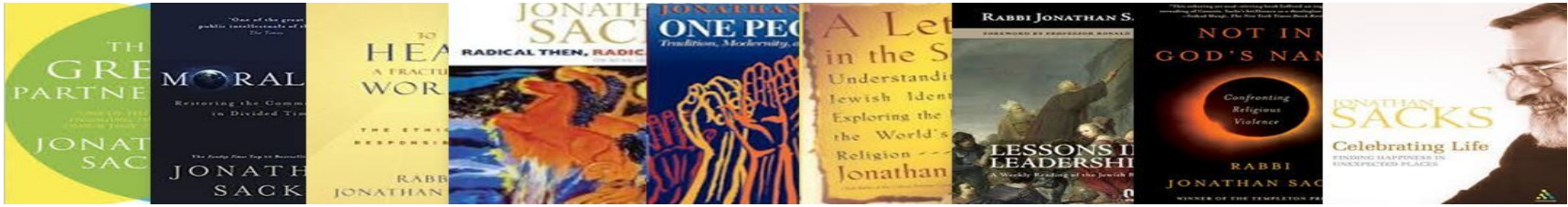
“There is this new concept of safe space where you are to be protected from views that may be hurtful to you. I have exactly the opposite definition of safe space. Not mocking, but challenging. Listening respectfully. That is what university should be about. You listen to views opposed to your own because you know that the people opposed to you will listen respectfully to you.”

Summary

- 1) Caring To Make Change- in our own lives and in the world.
- 2) Always remember to be a mensch.
- 3) The Importance of Family and Close Friends
- 4) Pride in Being Jewish
- 5) Judaism's Role in the World
- 6) Scope of influence- employ different methods
- 7) Dignity of Difference- Other Religions, People of Dissenting Opinions

Concluding Thoughts

- “It is difficult, if not impossible, for us to think of Rabbi Sacks in the past tense. He has been an integral part of our lives and an ongoing source of direction, motivation and inspiration. In reality, though, **he will never exist in the past**, such was his legacy, which will provide insight and inspiration for many years to come; a legacy which will highlight the relevance of our Torah tradition in modern times; a legacy that will enshrine the respectful place of religion within our ever-changing world.” - **Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**
- “Shmuel Yosef Agnon, the Nobel prize winning writer, once speculated that Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, speaks not about human death but about Divine life, as if it were our way of offering comfort to God for the loss of one of His children. **Mortality is written into the human condition, but so too is the possibility of immortality, in the good we do that continues, long after we are here, to beget further good.** There are lives that defeat death and redeem existence from tragedy. We knew, that day, that we had known one of them”- **Rabbi Sacks**
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For Further Study

- <https://rabbisacks.org/>
- <https://www.ipost.com/opinion/a-primer-on-the-theology-of-rabbi-jonathan-sacks-opinion-648955>
- <https://www.bagels.tv/rabbi-sacks-5-videos/>
- <https://traditiononline.org/the-thought-worlds-of-rabbi-sacks/>
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-