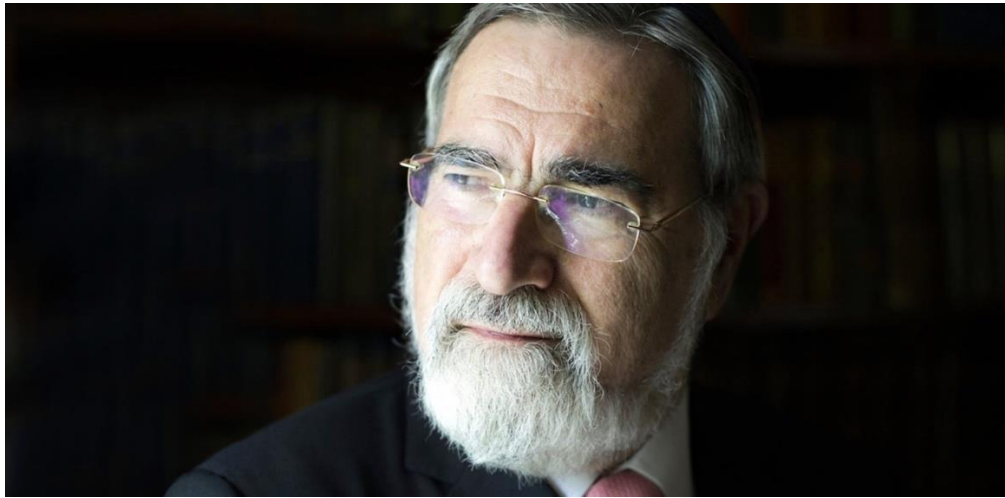




Yeshiva University  
THE RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS–HERENSTEIN  
CENTER FOR VALUES AND LEADERSHIP

**The Impossible Dream:  
Celebrating Israel's 75<sup>th</sup> with Insights from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**



**The Distinctive Spiritual Character of Israel**

**BT Menakhot 44a**

תניא נמי הכי הדר בפונדקי בא"י והשוכר בית בח"ל כל שלשים יום פטור מן המזוזה מיכן ואילך חייב אבל השוכר בית בא"י עושה מזוזה לאלתר משום יישוב דא"י

In the case of one who resides in a guesthouse [*pundaki*] in Eretz Yisrael, or one who rents a house outside of Eretz Yisrael, for the first thirty days he is exempt from the mitzva of mezuzah; from then on he is obligated. But one who rents a house in Eretz Yisrael must affix a mezuzah immediately, due to the settlement of Eretz Yisrael.

**Rabbi Sacks Explains...**

“In Jewish law, one who rents a house outside Israel is obliged to affix a mezuzah only after thirty days. Until then it is not yet regarded as a dwelling place. Only after thirty days does it become, de facto, home. In Israel, however, one who rents a house is immediately obligated, *mishum Yishuv eretz Yisrael*, “because of the command to settle Israel.” Outside Israel, Jewish life is a way, a path, a route. Even an encampment, a place of rest, is still called a journey.”

Encampments and Journeys (*Pekudei*, Covenant & Conversation)

“For Jewish peoplehood to be a concept that embraces a continuity of Jewish life, past, present and future, there must be an asymmetry between Israel and the diaspora: the asymmetry between a permanent home and a temporary dwelling. That Jews have spent the vast majority of their history away from home and that most Jews today do not live there neither compromises nor contradicts the fact that Jewish life is a life lived toward Israel.”

*Arguments for the Sake of Heaven*, (Jason Aronson, Inc. 1990), p. 157

“In Israel, there are four components of Jewish identity that Israeli Jews breath in through the air: their location, their nationality, their calendar, and their language.”

Micah Goodman, *The Wondering Jew: Israel and the Search for Jewish Identity* (Yale University Press, 2020), p. 98

### **Israel: Fate and Destiny**

Judaism has always distinguished between an existence of fate and an existence of destiny. What is the nature of the existence of fate? It is an existence of compulsion, an existence of the type described by the Mishnah, “Against your will do you live out your life.” (*Avot* 4:29), a pure factual existence, one link in a mechanical chain, devoid of meaning, direction, purpose, but subject to the forces of the environment unto which the individual has been cast by providence, without prior consultation. The “I” of fate has the image of an object. As an object, he appears as made and not as maker... ...What is the nature of the existence of destiny? It is an active mode of existence, one wherein man confronts the environment into which he was thrown, possessed of an understanding of his uniqueness, of his special worth of his freedom, and of his ability to struggle with his external circumstances without forfeiting either his independence or his selfhood. The motto of the “I” of destiny is, “Against your will you are born and against your will you die, but you live of your own free will.” Man is born like an object, dies like an object, but possesses the ability to live like a subject, like a creator, an innovator, who can impress his own individual seal upon his life and can extricate himself from a mechanical type of existence and enter into a creative, active mode of being.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny* [*Kol Dodi Dofek*], p. 2-6

“In Israel, Jewish life is a community of fate. There, Jews, from the most secular to the most pious, suffer equally from war and terror, and benefit equally from prosperity and peace. Judaism, in Israel, is a presence you breathe, not just a religion you practise. In Israel as nowhere else, Jewishness is part of the public domain, in the language, the landscape, the calendar. There you can stand amid the ruins and relics of towns that were living communities in the time of the Bible and feel the full, astonishing sweep of time across which the Jewish people wrestled with its fate as Jacob once wrestled with the angel. And there you become conscious, in the faces you see and the accents you hear, of the astonishing diversity of Jews from every country and culture, brought together in the great ingathering as once, in Ezekiel’s vision, the dismembered fragments of a broken people joined together and came to life again.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense*, p. 46-47

# The Religious Zionism of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

## The Two Dominant Strands of Religious Zionism

1. **The Political Zionism of religious Jews** – Rabbi Reines, founder of Mizrachi

2. **Messianic Religious Zionism** – Rabbis Alkali, Kalisher, A.Y. Kook

*The lesser-known third strand*

3. **Prophetic Religious Zionism** - Kibbutz HaDati, Y. Leibovitz, Rabbis Lichtenstein, Rabinovitch

### 1. Rabbi Sacks as a religious Political Zionist

Jonathan Sacks *Future Tense A Vision for Jews and Judaism in the Global Culture*  
(Schocken, 2009)

Nation after nation shut its doors. **Millions of Jews were in danger & there was nowhere they could go.** Jews discovered that on the whole surface of the earth there was not an inch they could call *home* As defined by the poet Robert Frost as the place where: ‘When you have to go there, they have to let you in.’ From that moment a Jewish homeland... became a *moral necessity*.

### 2. Messianic Religious Zionism: Yes to prophetic resonance, No to ‘holy’ politics

Quotes from Moshe Hellinger, I. Hershkowitz, B. Susser *Religious Zionism and the Settlement Project: Ideology, Politics and Civil Disobedience* (SUNY, 2018)

Rabbi A.I. Kook (1920)

**The State of Israel, the foundation of God’s throne in the world** (Kook, 1993, III: 191).

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook:

There are those who claim that rabbis should not interfere in politics. We are not dealing here with politics in the narrow sense but rather...**with the Divine that is concretely revealed in the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel...** The attitude that rabbis should not intervene in politics is a Christian attitude. **Israeli sovereignty receives its true value and its true content from this very source of holiness.** (Kook, 1995: 73).

Rabbi Shlomo Aviner:

"The government of Israel is... a **representative of the kingdom of heaven** that appears in the world in the attire of the Kingdom of Israel – *whether this is acknowledged or not*"

Any decision of a government body to transfer parts of the Land of Israel to the Gentiles is in violation of the laws of the Torah ...**The Torah is the constitution of the Jewish State...**"

### **In Contrast....**

The view that the creation of the State of Israel is the work of divine providence, recurs repeatedly by **Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik's**. It is not, however, in the sense of messianic "redemption"; apocalyptic hints are nowhere to be found.

Dov Schwartz 2002. *Faith at The Crossroads: A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism*. Brill

**Jonathan Sacks *Future Tense A Vision for Jews & Judaism in the Global Culture*** (Schocken, 2009)

"Twenty-six centuries ago, in exile in Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel had the most haunting of all prophetic visions. He saw a **valley of dry bones**, a heap of skeletons. God asked him, 'Son of man, can these bones live?'... Yet a **mere three years after standing face-to-face with the angel of death, the Jewish people, by proclaiming the state of Israel, made a momentous affirmation of life**, as if it had **heard across the centuries the echo of God's words to Ezekiel: 'I will bring you back to the land of Israel.'**"

"The form of politics closest in spirit to Judaism at this time is liberal democracy... It is limited government, of a kind Judaism favors. **The liberal democratic state does not aspire to be a vehicle of redemption**; it is there to keep the peace, establish the rule of law, and ensure non-violent transitions of power."

Yeshayahu Leibovitz rejected any ascription of "holiness" to a political entity.

**"Any attempt to see the state as the highest value... is a form of idolatry."**

Every Israeli offer, every withdrawal, every hint at concessions has been interpreted by the Palestinians as a sign of weakness and has led to yet greater terror...[Yet] I believe that the Palestinians should have a state... I believe that they should have freedom and dignity... **Jews did not return home to deny others a home.**

### **3. Prophetic Religious Zionism**

**Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, III, 27**

Cited by Rabbi Nahum Rabinovitch, 'On Religion & Politics in Israel' in Jonathan Sacks, Ed. *Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity* (Ktav, 1991)

The Torah as a whole aims at two things: the welfare of the soul and **the welfare of the body... the welfare of the body... consists in the governance of the city and the well-being of all its people...** This cannot be achieved by one isolated individual...**only thru political association** ...the welfare of people in their relationships with one another, through the abolition of reciprocal wrong-doing... the preservation of the population of the country is necessary [to facilitate] the achievement by individuals of the 'welfare of the soul.'

**Fishman, A. 2002 *Judaism and Collective Life: Self and community in the religious kibbutz*. Routledge**

The religious kibbutz was founded as a Halakhic community drawing on its members' mutual commitment and responsibility – a 'prophetic' covenantal community. Influenced by Hasidism, the ideologues of *HaPo'el HaMizrahi* conceived of *tikkun olam*... [as] an invitation to become a 'partner of God' in Creation.

**Leibowitz, Yeshayahu 1992. *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*. Harvard Univ. Press, Edited and introduction by Eliezer Goldman.**

The Yishuv was conducted on a *voluntary* basis. Religious pioneers established... communities, guided by Halakhah in conducting economic and social activities, including defense. They developed ways of application of Halakhah to the life of a *politically independent Jewish society*.

Leibovitz thought *raison d'état* would be an excuse for knavery of all kinds... The task of religious Jewry was to constitute a bulwark against deification of the state. This was thwarted by the status of the religious establishment as part of the machinery of the state... Its efforts were spent in protecting narrow sectional interests. Problems of the Jewish people as the bearers of Judaism were beyond their concern.

### **Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense***

Judaism is the constitution of a self-governing nation, the architectonics of a *society* dedicated to the service of God *in freedom* and dignity. Without a land and state, Judaism is a shadow of itself.

Only in Israel can [we] live within a calendar structured according to the rhythms of the Jewish year. **Only in Israel can Jews live Judaism in anything other than an edited edition.**

**It is about the social virtues:** righteousness (tzedek/tzedakah), justice (mishpat), loving-kindness (chessed) and compassion (rachamim). **These structure the template of biblical law, which covers all aspects of the life of society, its economy, its welfare systems, its education, family life, employer–employee relations, the protection of the environment and so on. None of this was possible without a land.**

**Judaism is about society, not the state. To be sure, Judaism requires a state,** but it is conspicuous that its structures of governance came to it from the outside... Its first structure of governance came not from Moses but from Jethro.

**Judaism must be depoliticized and put back where it belongs, in civil society, far removed from all structures of power. [This] is the challenge of Judaism in the State of Israel in our time.** Its place is not in party politics, not as an arm of the state, not as a set of segregated enclaves, not as an ‘adversary culture’, and not as a territorial ideology... If religion is not seen by Israelis as a unifying force, if religious Jews are not admired for their work with the poor, the lonely and the vulnerable, **if Judaism is not the voice of justice and compassion, then something is wrong in the soul of Israel.**

As Rabbi Dr Zarum pointed out at the end of this webcast... Rabbi Sacks views religion’s role in Israel as based on influence rather than power.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/korach/power-versus-influence/>

“Power operates by division, influence by multiplication. With power, the more we share, the less we have. With influence, the more we share, the more we have... So deep is the difference that the Torah allocates them to two distinct leadership roles: king and prophet. Kings had

power. They could levy taxes, conscript people to serve in the army... Without this, there could be no government, no defence of a country and no safeguard against lawlessness and anarchy.

**Prophets, by contrast, had no power at all.** They commanded no armies. They levied no taxes. They spoke God's word, but had no means of enforcing it. All they had was influence – but what influence! To this day, Elijah's fight against corruption, Amos' call to social justice, Isaiah's vision of the end of days, are still capable of moving us by the sheer force of their **inspiration.**"

## Rabbi Sacks' Theological Reflections upon Israel

1. R. Jonathan Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant: Jewish Thought after the Holocaust* (Manchester University Press, 1992), p.17-18

Proclaimed in 1948, it [the State of Israel] represents for many Jews the 'Jewish return into history' and the vindication of the covenantal promise that one day Jews would return to their land. Rarely has a sequence of events lent itself more naturally to theological interpretation. The central drama of the Mosaic books is the threefold sequence of enslavement in Egypt, exodus, and the revelation at Sinai. Twentieth-century Jewish history has had its own enslavement and attempted genocide and its own exodus and entry into the land...

The existence of the State of Israel has underlined the postmodern situation of the Jew. It has served as a world-wide focus of Jewish peoplehood and thus deepened the new particularism. The shift it has marked from passivity to the active shaping of history has encouraged Jews in the diaspora to adopt a more activist stance of their own.

2. R. Jonathan Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant*, p. 73

The transition from Holocaust to national sovereignty was, for Rabbi Soloveitchik, a Divine summons to respond to history. History is not the bearer of unambiguous messages. Instead, like the relationship between the lover and beloved in the Song of Songs, it is a series of intimations that may or may not be recognized and reciprocated. God knocks on the door of human consciousness, and all depends on whether we rush to admit Him, or delay and find that the moment has passed.

The Holocaust, followed by the creation of the state, was such a moment. It posed for Jews the question of whether they would see the sequence of events as incidents of external fate or as a Divine call to inward renewal. Rabbi Soloveitchik implicitly suggested that the messianic character of modern Jewish history depended on how Jews responded to it. Covenantal history is not made by acts of God alone. It is made by the interaction of God and man.

3. R. Joseph Soloveitchik, "*Kol Dodi Dofek: It is the Voice of My Beloved that Knocketh*," in *Theological and Halakhic Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. Rosenberg, Heuman (Ktav, 1992), p.68-76

Eight years ago, in the midst of a night of terror filled with the horrors of Maidanek, Treblinka and Buchenwald, in a night of gas chambers and crematoria, in a night of absolute divine self-concealment (*hester panim muhlat*), in a night ruled by the satan of doubt and apostasy which sought to sweep the maiden from her house into the Christian Church, in a night of continuous searching, of questing for the Beloved- in that very night the Beloved appeared. "God who conceals Himself in His dazzling hiddenness" suddenly manifested Himself and began to knock at the tent of His despondent and disconsolate love, twisting convulsively on her bed, suffering the pains of hell. As a result of the knocks on the door of the maiden, wrapped in mourning, the State of Israel was born!

### 6 Knocks

1. Political- No one can deny that from the standpoint of international relations, the establishment of the State of Israel, in a political sense, was an almost supernatural occurrence. I do not know whom the journalists, with their eyes of flesh and blood, saw

sitting in the chairman's seat during that fateful session when the General Assembly decided in favor of the establishment of the State. However, someone who at that time observed matters well with his spiritual eye could have sensed the presence of the true chairman who presided over the discussion- ie., the Beloved! It was He who knocked with His gavel on the podium.

2. Military- The small Israeli Defense Forces defeated the mighty armies of the Arab countries. The miracle of "the many in the hands of the few" took place before our very eyes.

3. Theological- All the claims of Christian theologians that God deprived the Jewish people of its rights in the land of Israel, and that all the biblical promises regarding Zion and Jerusalem refer, in an allegorical sense, to Christianity and the Christian Church, have been publicly refuted by the establishment of the State of Israel and have been exposed as falsehoods, lacking all validity.

4. Perplexed and assimilated youths- The era of self-concealment (*hastarat panim*) at the beginning of the 1940s resulted in great confusion among the Jewish masses and, in particular, among the Jewish youth. Assimilation grew and became more rampant, and the impulse to flee from Judaism and from the Jewish people reached a new height... Suddenly, the Beloved began to knock on the doors of the hearts of the perplexed, and His knock, the rise of the State of Israel, at the very least slowed the process of flight. Many of those who, in the past, were alienated from the Jewish people are now tied to the Jewish state by a sense of pride in its outstanding achievements.

5. Jewish blood is not free for the taking, is not hefker!... The time has come for us to fulfill the law of "an eye for an eye"... By taking revenge we raise ourselves up to the plane of self-defense, it becomes the elementary right of man qua man to avenge the wrongs inflicted upon him.

6. Safe Haven- A Jew who flees from a hostile country now knows that he can find a secure refuge in the land of his ancestors. This is a new phenomenon in our history. Until now, whenever Jewish communities were expelled from their lands, they had to wander in the wilderness of the nations that were not able to find shelter in another land. Because the gates were barred before exiles and wanderers, many Jewish communities were decimated. Now the situation has changed. If a particular people expels the Jewish minority from its midst, the exiles can direct their steps unto Zion, and she, like a compassionate mother, will gather in her children.

4. R. Jonathan Sacks, *A Letter in the Scroll* (Free Press, 2000), p. 174

Judaism led ordinary people to lead extraordinary lives. I profoundly believe that there is nothing special about Jews. The difference, as Menachem Kellner has aptly put it, lies not in the hardware but the software, not in what Jews are but in what they are called on to be. Above all, because they never forgot their ideals, even though they were often powerless to implement them, they were ready for great things when the moment came. Of these, the greatest in modern times was surely the creation of the state of Israel, one of the most unlikely achievements of all



time... Today, for the first time in two thousand years, we have a sovereign state in Israel and freedom and equality in the Diaspora. As almost never before we have the chance to succeed where historically Jews failed- in creating a covenantal society in our own land, and a genuine dialogue with humanity elsewhere.

5. R. Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2010), p.153

And a day will come when the story of Israel in modern times will speak not just to Jews, but to all who believe in the power of the human spirit as it reaches out to God, as an everlasting symbol of victory of life over death, hope over despair. Israel has taken a barren land and made it bloom again. It has taken an ancient language, the Hebrew of the Bible, and made it speak again. It has taken the West's oldest faith and made it young again. It has taken a shattered nation and made it live again.

# The Future of Israel: A People that shall *not* dwell apart

## 1. Numbers 23:9

כִּי מֵרֶאֶשׁ צְרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ  
וּמִגְּבוּעוֹת אֲשׁוּרֵנוּ  
הֵן עַם לְבָדָד יִשָּׁנֶן  
וּבְגוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשֵּׁב:

[Said Bilaam:] For from the top of the rocks do I see them [i.e. the Israelites]

and from the hills do I gaze on them

Lo, **a people that shall dwell apart,**

among the nations it shall not be reckoned.

## 2. BT Sanhedrin 105a

אמר רבי אבא בר כהנא כולם חזרו לקללה...

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana says: All the blessings eventually turned into curses...

### 2b. BT Taanit 20a

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן, מאי דכתיב: "נֶאֱמָנִים פְּצָעֵי אוֹהֵב וְנִעְתָּרוֹת נְשִׁיקוֹת שׁוֹנֵא?"  
טוֹבָה קַלְלָה שְׁקִיִּלָּל אַחִיָּה הַשִּׁילוֹנִי אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹתֵר מִבְּרָכָה שֶׁבִּרְכָן בְּלָעַם הָרָשָׁע.

R. Shmuel bar Nachmani said that R. Yonatan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:6)?

Much better was the curse with which Ahijah the Shilonite [Jewish prophet, 1 Kings 14:15] cursed the Jewish people, than the blessing with which Balaam the wicked blessed them.

## 3. Rabbi Sacks, *Future Tense* (Hodder, 2009), p.129

If Jews distrust the world, they will not seek to understand it and learn how to make their case and win allies in the world. They will see antisemitism where other factors are at work. They will lend Jewish identity a negativity that will encourage many young Jews to leave rather than stay. They will fall into the trap of moral solipsism, of talking to themselves in terms only intelligible to themselves. The phrase 'a people that dwells alone' will become a self-fulfilling prophecy that will not augur well for the future of Jews, Judaism or Israel. Those who believe that they are destined to be surrounded by enemies will lack the will and conviction to try to make friends.

## 4. Midrash - Sifrei Bamidbar 69:2

כיוצא בו "וישקהו" שלא נשקו בכל לבו. רשב"י אומר הלכה ביצוע שעשו שונא ליעקב אלא נהפך רחמיו באותה שעה ונשקו בכל לבו.

Similarly, (Gen. 33:4) "And he (Esav) kissed (*vayishakehu*) him (Jacob)": There are dots above the letters in "*vayishakehu*" — He did not kiss him with all his heart. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says: **It is a known law that Esau hates Jacob**, but his mercy gained the ascendancy at that time and he kissed him with all his heart.

## 5. BT Sofrim 15:10

ר"ש בן יוחי : **הטוב שבעובדי כוכבים (בשעת מלחמה) הרוג**, הטוב שבנחשים רצוץ את מוחו, הכשירה שבנשים בעלת כשפים, אשרי מי שהוא עושה רצונו של המקום :

R. Shimon bar Yochai taught: **The best of heathens (in wartime)\* should be killed**; the best of serpents should have their brain crushed; the most worthy of women indulges in witchcraft; happy is the one who does the will of the Omnipresent.

[\* possibly added later – see Mechilta Beshallah 2 on Ex.14:7]

## 6. Rabbi Sacks, *FutureTense*, p.129 (ctd.)

Jews are not destined to be outcasts, pariahs, friendless in the world. With the birth of the state of Israel, Jews are now part of the world, and they have a vital message to impart, a healing presence to enact. They have earned the right and acquired the duty of speaking to the world, engaging with the world, and to do so as Jews, in the particularity of their faith and the universality of their God.