



REMEMBERING RABBI SACKS ZT'L ON HIS SECOND YAHRZEIT

20 CHESHVAN



Benjy Singer, teacher and journalist, who runs the IsraelB online community, marks Rabbi Sacks' second yahrzeit.

The Jewish world marked the second yahrzeit of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks this week.



Benjy Singer

I interviewed Mr. Alan Sacks about his older brother, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, about his memories and reflections.

1) What do you miss most about your brother?

Rabbi Sacks and I were very close. What I miss most is the fact that I can no longer speak to him, or correspond with him on issues (social, moral, religious) that trouble me. And then, every so often to have fun with him, discussing music or film, which were very dear to his heart.

I never left a conversation with my brother without feeling somehow emotionally uplifted. In semi-humour, I could say that if I was feeling depressed about some state of affairs in the world, religious or otherwise, I could always feel reassured by the fact that my brother was even more depressed on the subject.

My brother had such a clear way of explaining issues of concern or contemporary relevance (that is of course why he was such a favorite of the BBC, the London Times and many other broadcasting outlets) that I left our discussions better able to face

the world.

2) Do you think Rabbi Sacks wanted to be a chief rabbi when he was younger?

As a teenager, I do not think that Rabbi Sacks had any dream of being a philosopher or a Rabbi. He was very interested in politics and debating and had originally planned to study Economics at University. The idea of philosophy came about when he was at Cambridge and the idea of pursuing a rabbinical career came later still.

His Jewish awakening was sparked (as it was for many) at around the time of the Six Day War, when Rabbi Sacks was at Cambridge University. And the story of his meeting with the Lubavicher Rebbe has been well publicised.

3) For you, what were the key characteristics of Rabbi Sacks?

There are too many character traits to remember here:

Giant intellect.

Master of Torah and Western culture, and an ability to view Western culture through the lens of Torah.

Enthusiasm.

Sense of humour.

Constant encouragement of others.

Willingness to let others take the limelight.

Endless pursuit of knowledge – the breadth of subjects that my brother studied was quite remarkable. If he had to speak with people from a particular field of activity or study, or if he had to lecture or write

on a subject, he wanted to know as much (or as much as possible) on that particular subject as those he was meeting with. These might be social workers, politicians, scientists, economists, politicians, religious leaders of other faiths, and so on.

4) What drove Rabbi Sacks?

Rabbi Sacks was quite remarkable in wanting each person with whom he came into contact to achieve his or her full potential. He was never condescending or patronising. For example, he always wanted to know from my children what they were doing, what they were studying.

Rabbi Sacks had an unparalleled ability to make those who listened to him or read him feel more intelligent than when they began listening or reading.

My brother would ask me regularly “What should I be doing next?” Always looking for ways to influence Jews and non-Jews to look for a higher moral principle, and not be self-centred.

Rabbi Sacks was never “superior”. He acted always with utmost dignity (even in private) and never suggested any superiority for himself over others or for the Jewish religion over other religions. He spoke a particular Jewish language that had universal appeal.

One thing that was unique about Rabbi Sacks as a Rabbi was the following. I have never encountered any rabbinical figure who at every possible opportunity singled out his wife for special mention and special



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praise.

Rabbi Sacks was a Rabbi of “today”. He explained why the Torah was relevant for issues of today which on their face had nothing to do with religion or philosophy and helped countless people from every background, Jewish or otherwise, religious or secular, to understand and cope with the morally or emotionally challenging problems of today.

5) Do you think Rabbi Sacks was a real Zionist?

Even though I have lived in Israel for forty years and have six children who served in the IDF, I always maintain that Rabbi Sacks was a greater Zionist than I am.

I think that there is no doubt about Rabbi Sacks’ stance on Zionism and living in Israel. Rabbi Sacks was perhaps the greatest ambassador for the State of Israel in the world. Rabbi Sacks saw Israel as the living heartbeat of the Jewish people and encouraged anyone and everyone to live in Israel.

If Rabbi Sacks were here today, in the State of Israel, I have no doubt that would be his message:

Do not deny the Other.

Do not label the Other.

Do not delegitimize the Other.

Do not attempt to cancel the Other.

Make your argument, listen to the other side’s argument, discuss, find a compromise, and move on together for the greater good. ■

Benjy Singer is a teacher and freelance writer and journalist. He also runs the IsraelB.org online community, an online portal, which provides useful information of events, shiurim and news for olim and Jews around the world.