

Reflections on the Passing of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z”l

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Elsewhere, Rabbi Sacks suggested that Judaism is a religion of “sacred discontent,” challenging us not to accept the world and its *tzures* as it is, but rather to keep working to make it better.ⁱ In his book *To Heal a Fractured World – The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005) he wrote, “*In Judaism, faith is not acceptance but protest, against the world that is, in the name of the world that is not yet but ought to be.*”ⁱⁱ He added,

*Judaism is not peace of mind... I remain in awe at the challenge God has set us: to be different, iconoclasts of the politically correct, to be God’s question-mark against the conventional wisdom of the age, to build, to change, to ‘mend’ the world until it becomes a place worthy of the divine presence because we have learned to honour the image of God that is humankind.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Rabbi Sacks’ words echo Rabbi Tarfon’s famous teaching from [Pirkei Avot](#), that “It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it.”

These teachings, which I first encountered more than a decade ago, have stayed with me ever since and shape my vision of my rabbinate as one founded on inclusion and action.

Following Rabbi Sacks’ passing, his daughter [Gila gave a moving hesped \(eulogy\)](#). Since May 2020 Gila has served as Director, Testing Strategy and Policy at the UK’s National Health Service. In her eulogy she mentioned a conversation she had with a colleague about whether coronavirus was solvable, and observed: “I had a moment of clarity about what my dad had given me: that single belief that nothing was inevitable, that no problems were too big for people to try and solve. That things could always be changed and people could always change them: that belief shaped everything else.”

We all have Divine light within us, and we all have the capacity to heal our world. May this be Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks’ legacy and may his memory forever be for a blessing. Amen.

Rabbi Dara Lithwick

ⁱ Ibid at p. 55: “Judaism begins not in wonder that the world is, but in protest that the world is not as it ought to be. It is in that cry, that sacred discontent, that Abraham’s journey begins.”

ⁱⁱ *To Heal a Fractured World – The Ethics of Responsibility*, p. 27.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. at p. 28.