



To honor Sephardic Temple's 100th anniversary, Sacks said, "You have maintained a great faithfulness and pride in your Sephardic traditions and customs."

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Inspires Sephardic Temple

» by Ryan Torok, Staff Writer

APPEARING AT SEPHARDIC TEMPLE Tifereth Israel on Jan. 21 before a sold-out crowd of close to 600 people, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of Britain, said the greatest challenges facing Jews in the 21st century are anti-Semitism, the loss of Jewish identity among young people and the chasm between American Jewry and Israel.

In town, in part to honor Sephardic Temple's 100th anniversary, Sacks said, "You have maintained a great faithfulness and pride in your Sephardic traditions and customs. I have to confess, I am not a Sephardi — I hope this doesn't shock you — but I admire the Sephardi[m] so much because you have a unique blend of — and this is the great distinction of the Sephardim — clear minds, warm hearts and an unshakeable soul. And to find all those together is really, really special."

He then went on to speak about how in Britain, non-Jewish leaders are pushing back against anti-Semitism, from Prime Minister Boris Johnson to "Harry Potter" author J.K. Rowling.

"Jews cannot fight anti-Semitism alone," Sacks said. "The victim cannot cure the crime. The hated cannot cure the hate. Here, your president [Donald Trump] has taken a clear and strong stand against anti-

Semitism," he said, citing Trump's December executive order to combat discrimination against Jews on college campuses.

"Anti-Zionism is one form of the new anti-Semitism," he added, before quoting from Robert Frost's poem "The Death of the Hired Man":



"Jews cannot fight anti-Semitism alone. The victim cannot cure the crime. The hated cannot cure the hate."

Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.

"How do viruses survive the immune system?" he posited. "The answer is they mutate, and that is what happened with anti-Semitism. We are living through the third mutation. The Middle Ages Jews were hated for their religion. In the 19th and 20th centuries, they were hated for their race. Today they are hated for their nation-state."

For the Jewish people, particularly at a time when anti-Semitism is increasing, the

Jewish home, the place that will always accept Jews, is Israel, Sacks said, adding it's why "we must support the State of Israel."

He went on to say, "The best way to fight anti-Semitism is to wear your identity with pride," noting that there was little logic to anti-Semitism and that through-

out history Jews have always been the irrational targets of people filled with hate. "The return of anti-Semitism to the world has happened within living memory of the Holocaust," Sacks said. "Over history the scapegoat of choice has been the Jews."

He also spoke about how Judaism has so much to offer the world. At a time when people are glued to social media and perpetually plugged in, Sacks said, "Shabbat was made for the 21st century." He added social media can be used to educate people about and engage with Judaism.

"In an age of climate change, of global instability, of the uncertain impact of A.I. [artificial intelligence], fragmented societies, deep division, no people, no faith, has handled uncertainty longer or more successfully than we have," he said. "So I think Judaism is a gift for the future, not just for the past."

Most of Sacks' passionate remarks, however, focused on Israel. "If you don't like some rabbinic decisions in Israel, not every Israeli does. But the truth is, I am sure that some Americans don't like some American politicians. But does that mean you don't like America? You love America. To me, Israel is the miracle of miracles," he said.

"No people has ever survived a 2,000-year exile and returned to its land. No people has ever taken a language that for 2,000 years had not been the language of everyday speech and made it speak again. No people has ever survived a tragedy like the Holocaust and defiantly said, 'I will not die but I will live and I will testify to the living God.' Israel is a miracle of biblical proportions, and even if it doesn't let you believe in God, at least let it make you believe in the people of God."

In the Q&A session with Rabbi Tal Sessler, Sacks spoke about meeting, while he



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was in his 20s, with the late Chabad Rebe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who instilled in him the importance of not only adhering to the tenets of Judaism but becoming a leader that brings other Jews into the fold.

“Judaism today is so important in a world of change because living Judaism does extraordinary things for us,” he said. “It strengthens family; it strengthens community; it gives us identity; it gives us a sense of global connectedness; it gives us commitment to helping others; it develops the mind, the heart and the soul.

Sephardic Temple Executive Director Avi Levy told the Journal after Sacks’ visit he was impressed with Sacks’ wisdom and his ability to connect with Ashkenazi and Sephardic audiences. In a separate interview, Sessler said he was honored that Sacks appeared at Sephardic Temple and helped the community celebrate its milestone.

“I could not think of a more worthy person to bring to Los Angeles both for the benefit of the greater L.A. Jewish community,” he said, “and specifically to celebrate our centennial.” ■



From left: Sephardic Temple Cantor Haim Mizrahi, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and Sephardic Temple Rabbi Tal Sessler.

Photos courtesy of Sephardic Temple

Excerpts From the Rabbi’s Speech

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“It is a famous fact that the Chinese ideogram for crisis also means opportunity. If you see any crisis as also an opportunity you have resilience. There is only one language I know that goes one better, and that is Hebrew, because in Hebrew the word for “crisis” is “Mashber,” but “Mashber” also means a “birthing stool,” so every crisis in Hebrew is “chevlei leida,” something new is being born. **So we don’t only see crisis as an opportunity, we see crisis as a spur to creativity, to something new.”**

“How do viruses survive the immune system? The answer is they mutate, and that is what happened with anti-Semitism. Every time a very effective defense against it has been created, an immune system, as was created after the Holocaust, the virus mutates. So we are living through the third mutation. The Middle Ages Jews were hated for their religion. In the 19th and 20th centuries, they were hated for their race. Today they are hated for their nation-state. Anti-Zionism is one form of the new anti-Semitism.”

“And in an age of climate change, of global instability, of the uncertain impact of A.I., fragmented societies, deep division, **no people, no faith, has handled uncertainty longer or more successfully than we have.** So I think Judaism is a gift for the future, not just for the past.”

“If we in the Diaspora don’t like Israeli politics, most Israelis don’t like Israeli politics. If you don’t like some rabbinic decisions in Israel, not every Israeli does. But the truth is, **I am sure that some Americans don’t like some American politicians. But does that mean you don’t like America — you love America.** To me, Israel is the miracle of miracles.”