

A Shabbat message from Rabbi Rheins  
*Shabbat Chayei Sarah 5781*

## **Facing the Future Without Fear .... Together**

Last Shabbat, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks died at the age of 72. He was the Orthodox Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom from 1991 to 2013. As a world renowned scholar, philosopher, author and leader, his influence will be felt for many generations. Adding to our sense of loss is the fact that we are pondering his life and death during this week of his Shiva as we read about the death of our matriarch Sarah in the Torah portion *Chayei Sarah* (Genesis 23:1- 25:18).

For those who are not familiar with Rabbi Sacks, he had a unique gift of bringing profound thought and explaining difficult concepts with a warm, simple and entertaining way. One of his most popular presentations was recorded at a Ted Talk in 2017. It's titled [How we can face the future without fear](#). Here are some highlights of his talk:

So is there something we can do, each of us, to be able to face the future without fear? I think there is. And one way into it is to see that perhaps the most simple way into a culture and into an age is to ask: What do people worship? People have worshipped so many different things -- the sun, the stars, the storm. Some people worship many gods, some one, some none. In the 19th and 20th centuries, people worshipped the nation, the Aryan race, the communist state. What do

we worship? I think future anthropologists will take a look at the books we read on self-help, self-realization, self-esteem. They'll look at the way we talk about morality as being true to oneself, the way we talk about politics as a matter of individual rights, and they'll look at this wonderful new religious ritual we have created. You know the one? Called the "selfie." And I think they'll conclude that what we worship in our time is the self, the me, the I.

And this is great. It's liberating. It's empowering. It's wonderful. But don't forget that biologically, we're social animals. We've spent most of our evolutionary history in small groups. We need those face-to-face interactions where we learn the choreography of altruism and where we create those spiritual goods like friendship and trust and loyalty and love that redeem our solitude. When we have too much of the "I" and too little of the "we," we can find ourselves vulnerable, fearful and alone. It was no accident that Sherry Turkle of MIT called the book she wrote on the impact of social media "Alone Together."

So I think the simplest way of safeguarding the future "you" is to strengthen the future "us" in three dimensions: the us of relationship, the us of identity and the us of responsibility.

Have you noticed how magical thinking has taken over our politics? So we say, all you've got to do is elect this strong leader and he or she will solve all our problems for us. Believe me, that is magical thinking. And then we get the extremes: the far right, the far left, the extreme religious and the extreme anti-religious, the far right dreaming of a golden age that never was, the far left dreaming of a utopia that never will be and the religious and anti-religious equally

convinced that all it takes is God or the absence of God to save us from ourselves. That, too, is magical thinking, because the only people who will save us from ourselves is we the people, all of us together. And when we do that, and when we move from the politics of me to the politics of all of us together, we rediscover those beautiful, counterintuitive truths: that a nation is strong when it cares for the weak, that it becomes rich when it cares for the poor, it becomes invulnerable when it cares about the vulnerable. That is what makes great nations.

So here is my simple suggestion. It might just change your life, and it might just help to begin to change the world. Do a search and replace operation on the text of your mind, and wherever you encounter the word "self," substitute the word "other." So instead of self-help, other-help; instead of self-esteem, other-esteem. And if you do that, you will begin to feel the power of what for me is one of the most moving sentences in all of religious literature. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." We can face any future without fear so long as we know we will not face it alone. So for the sake of the future "you," together let us strengthen the future "us." [https://www.ted.com/talks/rabbi\\_lord\\_jonathan\\_sacks](https://www.ted.com/talks/rabbi_lord_jonathan_sacks))

Still struggling through this pandemic, still wobbly after the most divisive political campaign in memory, still wondering what the future holds and when we can regain some sense of normalcy, Rabbi Sack's words remind us that the first step is to realize that we are not alone. Rather, we have each other. We have "us."

After mourning his beloved Sarah, our patriarch Abraham purchased a burial cave in Hebron and then arranged for his grieving son Isaac to meet Rebecca, find love, and continue the story of our people. After loss, we mourn, we contemplate, we heal, and then we begin rebuilding and writing the next chapters of our story.

On this Shabbat, let us take the time to reflect on the inspiring people that we've known and loved and then strive to continue their legacy by living our lives with a renewed sense of meaning and purpose.

*Shabbat Shalom,*

*Rick*

Rabbi Rick Rheins