

Books by Rabbi Sacks Relevant to American Jewry

Morality

A powerful call to restore our shared moral foundation and shift from “I” to “We” in an age of individualism and fragmentation.

- **Chapter 5: From ‘We’ to ‘I’:** This chapter traces the intellectual history of the West's shift from a collective "We" culture, rooted in shared morality, to an individualistic "I" culture that prioritises the self, impacting societal cohesion.
- **Chapter 21: Religion:** This chapter highlights religion's crucial role in society by building strong communities, fostering trust and law-abidingness, and cultivating a long-term perspective essential for societal survival, as demonstrated by Judaism's enduring identity in dispersion.

Future Tense

A passionate argument for Jewish confidence and purpose in modern times, embracing the future rather than fearing it.

- **Chapter 2: Is There Still a Jewish People?** This chapter critically examines the concept of "Jewish peoplehood" in the face of modern divisions between Israel and the Diaspora, asserting that a "covenant of faith" is paramount for sustaining collective Jewish identity beyond a mere "covenant of fate".
- **Chapter 3: Jewish Continuity and How to Achieve It:** This chapter addresses the challenges to Jewish continuity, such as assimilation and intermarriage, arguing that long-term survival of the Jewish people in dispersion depends on a commitment to "mitzvah" (commandment) and duty, not just ethnicity or culture.

Ceremony & Celebration

A deep dive into the Jewish festivals, revealing how ritual and meaning shape personal and communal Jewish identity.

- **Chapter 3: Sukkot: Season of Joy:** This chapter explores how Sukkot, with its fragile temporary dwelling, embodies the Jewish experience of exile and vulnerability while simultaneously being the "season of our joy," signifying the people's resilience and capacity for gratitude and faith even in dispersion, and its historical role in national rededication after exile.
- **Chapter 5: Shavuot: The Greatest Gift:** This chapter highlights Shavuot as the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, establishing Torah and covenant as the fundamental sources of Jewish identity and collective freedom, emphasizing how study became a substitute for sacrifice to ensure the people's continuity and influence in dispersion.

I Believe

A moving collection of weekly reflections on faith, identity, and responsibility – anchoring Torah teachings in today's moral challenges.

- **Chapter "Bo: Writing My Own Chapter":** This chapter asserts that Jewish identity is primarily about constructing a meaningful narrative rooted in a universal story of liberation and hope, rather than being narrowly defined as an ethnic group.
- **Chapter "Yitro: Particular Paths to a Universal God":** This chapter explores how Judaism's unique particularity, coupled with its belief in a universal God, offers a profound framework for recognizing and respecting the dignity of "the other", fostering acceptance across diverse groups.

Lessons in Leadership

Insights from the weekly Torah reading that highlight core leadership values needed to guide Jewish and civic life today.

- **"Vayetzeh: Light in Dark Times":** This section highlights how Judaism consistently responded to historical crises (Babylonian exile, Roman destruction, Holocaust) by deepening its engagement with Torah and creating enduring communal structures, vital for understanding how a diaspora sustains itself.
- **"Behar: Think Long":** This chapter underscores the impact of Jewish collective responsibility and acts of kindness "across the borders of faith," exemplified by the community's aid in Kosovo, showcasing American Jewry's potential international influence and role.

The Home We Build Together

Proposes a new vision of society based on covenant, where difference is respected and all citizens feel they belong.

- **Chapter 3: A Brief History of Multiculturalism:** This chapter contrasts different models of societal integration and shows how minority groups often cluster together to preserve their identity and cultural distinctiveness, which is fundamental to understanding a sustained diaspora.
- **Chapter 15: Face-to-Face, Side-by-Side:** This section emphasizes the critical role of "bridging capital" through direct interactions across communal boundaries to foster friendship and understanding, transforming strangers into allies.

To Heal a Fractured World

Presents Judaism as a religion of responsibility, inspiring readers to live with purpose and help mend a broken world.

- **Chapter 7: Like a Single Soul:** This chapter elucidates the principle of "all Israel are sureties for one another," demonstrating how this collective responsibility empowers even small Jewish communities to achieve extraordinary things and sustain themselves in dispersion.
- **Chapter 8: The Kindness of Strangers:** This chapter introduces *darkhei shalom* ("the ways of peace"), explaining it as universalized kindness and responsibility towards non-Jews, rooted in the Jewish experience of being strangers and remembering suffering.

From Optimism to Hope

A concise, inspiring series of essays on faith, politics, and society, urging us to move beyond optimism to active hope.

- **"Community" (6 March 2000):** This entry posits that religion is fundamentally about belonging and community, fostering "moral literacy" and mutual support essential for sustaining collective life in a diaspora.
- **"A Gateway Of Hope" (12 June 2000):** While focused on Israel, this piece illustrates how true peace requires making "space for someone else" and compromising one's own dreams for the sake of others', a vital lesson for international relations and influence.

The Dignity of Difference

Makes the case for religious and cultural diversity as a moral imperative in a globalized world.

A Letter in the Scroll

A personal and collective meditation on Jewish identity, peoplehood, and moral purpose across generations.

- **Chapter 11: Tragedy and Triumph:** This chapter explains how Judaism ensured its survival in dispersion by shifting from Temple sacrifice to the synagogue as a house of prayer and study, becoming a "religion of the book, not the sword".
- **Chapter 16: Why I Am a Jew:** This chapter articulates Judaism's unique balance between individual and collective responsibility, asserting that a strong, secure Jewish identity empowers one to appreciate and contribute to other cultures.

The Politics of Hope

Offers a bold vision of society based not just on contracts (market/state) but on covenants of shared moral commitment.

- **Chapter 19: Politics and the Art of Balance:** This chapter argues for restoring a balance in political thought by recognizing the crucial role of civil society – encompassing families, communities, and voluntary networks – alongside the individual and the state. It posits that a healthy liberal society requires giving due weight to these mediating structures which are essential for social cohesion and sustaining freedom.
- **Chapter 22: Reclaiming the Ground of Hope:** This chapter argues that hope, a core Judaeo-Christian concept and social virtue, is an active force that defeats despair and enables societal transformation. It is sustained by families and communities, grounding the belief that collective responsibility and moral action can build a better world.

Arguments for the Sake of Heaven

Explores the nature of constructive disagreement in Jewish tradition and its value for building stronger communities.

- **"Preface: Argument for the Sake of Heaven":** This section distinguishes between argument for the sake of truth (which leads to enlightenment and endures) and argument

for the sake of victory (which is destructive), advocating for the former in all communal discourse.

- **"Chapter 11: Tradition as Argument":** This chapter posits that Judaism is fundamentally a "historically extended, socially embodied argument" where continuous, respectful disagreement is a vital religious expression that unites diverse voices into a cohesive tradition.

Books by the Conference Speakers Relevant to American Jewry

American Judaism: A History (Jonathan Sarna)

A definitive narrative of Jewish life in America from 1654 to the present.

Flexigidity (Gidi Grinstein)

A framework for balancing continuity and adaptability in Jewish identity and institutions.

Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land

A curated collection of texts on freedom and justice through a Jewish American lens.

Here All Along (Sarah Hurwitz)

A journey into Judaism by a former political speechwriter rediscovering its wisdom and relevance.

Esther in America (Stuart Halpern)

Explores how the story of Esther has shaped American Jewish self-understanding.

The Promise of Liberty (Stuart Halpern)

Jewish perspectives on American ideals and their enduring resonance.

The Case for Jewish Peoplehood (Erica Brown and Misha Galperin)

A thoughtful defense of Jewish collective identity in an age of individualism.

The American Jewish Experience (Jonathan Sarna)

A sourcebook capturing the complexities of Jewish life in the U.S.

Lincoln and the Jews (Jonathan Sarna)

Chronicles Abraham Lincoln's relationship with the Jewish community and its meaning for Jewish American integration.

When General Grant Expelled the Jews (Jonathan Sarna)

A historical episode that sheds light on American antisemitism and redemption.

Books on American Jewry

Tablets Shattered (Joshua Leifer)

A critique of American Jewish institutional life and the generational shift in political engagement.

Jewish Pride (Michael Steinhardt)

A manifesto for reviving Jewish identity and community strength in American society.

Judaism as a Civilization (Mordecai Kaplan)

A foundational work arguing for a cultural, evolving Jewish identity in America.

A Passion for a People (Avraham Infeld)

A personal guide to building Jewish peoplehood across ideological lines.

The Jewish American Paradox (Robert Mnookin)

A legal scholar's argument for embracing inclusive, choice-based Jewish identity in the U.S.