

The Dignity of Difference (2002)

Lecture CCJU <http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/shureview/vol25/iss1/2>

If religion is the problem, let religion be the solution. The question I set to myself is, “Can we find—especially within the three Abrahamic monotheisms—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—a road to tolerance, a road to coexistence, or better still, a respect for difference?” That is the path I sought to explore in my book, *The Dignity of Difference*.

a. The problem (pg.45-48)

One belief, more than any other is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals. It is the belief that those who do not share my faith - or my race or my ideology - do not share my humanity. At best they are second-class citizens. At worst they forfeit the sanctity of life itself. They are the unsaved, the unbelievers, the infidel, the unredeemed; they stand outside the circle of salvation. If faith is what makes us human, then those who do not share my faith are less than fully human. From this equation flowed the Crusades, the Inquisitions, the jihads, the pogroms, the blood of human sacrifice through the ages. From it substituting race for faith - ultimately came the Holocaust.

I used to think that the Holocaust had cured us of this idea that it was impossible not to hear from the ghosts of Auschwitz the cry, 'Never again. Now I am not so sure. I have come increasingly to the view that if we do not, like Jacob, wrestle with the dark angel of our nature and beliefs, there will be other tragedies. In Rwanda, Cambodia and the Balkans there already have been, and there will be more.

This is the greatest religious challenge of all, and much will depend on whether we are equal to it. It is a challenge posed in the Bible's opening chapters. The first recorded act of religious worship leads directly to the first murder, the first fratricide. Two people bring an offering to God. The name of one is Abel; the other was Cain. I read this as a clear and fateful warning, at the very beginning of the book of books, that just as there is a road from faith to redemption, so there is a direct path from religion to violence. What is it that leads people to shed blood in the name of God?

There is one answer with which we are familiar. Religion is about identity, and identity excludes. For every 'We' there is a 'Them'.

... Today we are inclined to see resurgent tribalism as the great danger of our fragmenting world. It is, but it is not the only danger. The paradox is that the very thing we take to be the antithesis of tribalism – universalism - can also be deeply threatening, and may be equally inadequate as an account of the human situation. A global culture is a universal culture, and universal cultures, though they have brought about great good. have also done immense harm. They see as the basis of our humanity the fact that we are all ultimately the same. We are vulnerable. We are embodied creatures. We feel hunger, thirst, fear, pain. We reason, hope, dream, aspire. These things are true and important. But we are also different. Each landscape, language, culture, community is unique. Our very dignity as persons is rooted in the fact that none of us ... is like the other.

b. EXORCIZING PLATO'S GHOST pg.49

If you seek truth, Aristotle, do not look down to this world that surrounds us, empirical reality with all its messy and chaotic particulars. Look up to heaven and the world of forms,

for it is there that you will find the true essence and nature of things. There, in place of particularity and conflict, you will find unity and harmony.

In the world of ideas, difference is resolved into sameness. Particulars give way to universals. The world we see, in which we move and live, he argued in *The Republic* in the famous parable of the cave, is a mere play of shadows. The true essence of things is not matter but form, ideas, not their concrete embodiment in the world of the senses. That is where trees become Treeness, where men become Man and apparent truths coalesce into Truth.

It is a wondrous dream, that of Plato, and one that has never ceased to appeal to his philosophical and religious heirs: the dream of reason, a world of order set against the chaos of life, an eternity beyond the here and now. Its single most powerful idea is that truth-reality, the essence of things - is universal. How could it be otherwise?

c. Genesis. From Universalism to Particularism. Babel. (CCJU lecture)

Civilization is a journey from the particular to the universal. As soon as we see how in Western thought civilization is a journey from the particular to the universal, we begin to realize what is so radical about the philosophy of the Book of Genesis. Genesis begins with the universal, with Adam and Eve and humanity as a whole. And it is from there that it moves to the particular, to Abraham and Sarah and their children. It is the exact opposite movement of Platonic thought; it is what makes Genesis what I call Western civilization's great counter-Platonic narrative.

The question is, why? And the obvious place to look for the answer is in the passage immediately before God's call to Abraham to leave his land, his birthplace. What precedes this passage is Genesis 11, the story of the tower of Babel. That is the transitional moment. The first verse of the story begins with a very striking phrase: "The whole world was of one language and shared vocabulary." The whole world was in a state of unity. And the question is, what was wrong with that? And it was here that, in writing my book, I relied on a remarkable interpretation given by one of the great Jewish scholars of the nineteenth century known as Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, who said an extraordinary thing. He said, "**Babel was the first totalitarianism. It was the first place that had no room for difference.**" And what is fascinating is that in effect, Netziv was echoing Aristotle's critique of Plato's *Republic*. Aristotle said that the unity presupposed in Plato's *Republic* cannot be a free society, it is not a polis.

Bereshit ch.11	בראשית פרק יא
1. Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words.	(א) וְיְהִי כָל הָאָרֶץ שְׂפָה אֶחָת וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים:
2. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.	(ב) וְיְהִי בְנֻסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּמְצְאוּ בְקֵעָה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם:
3. They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard." Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.	(ג) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ הִבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה לְבִנְיָם וַיִּשְׂרְפֶהָ לְשִׂרְפָה וַתְּהִי לָהֶם הַלְּבָנָה לְאֶבֶן וְהַחֲמֶר הָיָה לָהֶם לַחֲמֶר:
4. And they said, " Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world. "	(ד) וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִבֵּה נִבְנֶה לָנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בַשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה לָנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן נִפְּוֹץ עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ:
5. The Lord came down to look at the city and tower that man had built,	(ה) וַיֵּרֵד יְהוָה וַיִּקְוֶה לִרְאוֹת אֶת הָעִיר וְאֶת הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי הָאָדָם:
6. and the Lord said, " If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they conspire	(ו) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֲלוֹא אֶחָד וְשִׂפָּה אֶחָת לְכָלָם זֶה הַחֲלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת וְעַתָּה לֹא יִבְצֵר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת:

<p>to do will be out of their reach. 7. Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another's speech." 8. Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building the city. 9. That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord confounded the speech of the whole earth, and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.</p>	<p>(ז) הָבֵּה נִדְּדָה וְנִבְלָה שָׁם שְׁפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׁפַת רֵעֵהוּ: (ח) וַיִּפֹּץ יְהוָה אֹתָם מִשָּׁם עַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָאָרֶץ וַיַּחְדְּלוּ לְבַנֵּת הָעִיר: (ט) עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ בָּבֶל כִּי שָׁם בָּלַל יְהוָה שְׁפַת כָּל הָאָרֶץ וַיִּמְשָׁם הַפִּיצָם יְהוָה עַל פְּנֵי כָּל הָאָרֶץ</p>
<p>And we will make a name for ourselves - people were set up to watch and be in charge of the thing, and they were army chiefs in charge of punishing those who would cross, since if this is not the case there would be no need for the tower. And all that was due to fear/suspicion.</p> <p>Lest we be scattered over all the face of the earth - However, we must understand why they feared that someone might leave to another land? And it is understood that this was related to the uniformity that was among them. And since the opinions of people are not identical, they feared that people might abandon this philosophy and adopt another. Therefore they sought to ensure that no one would leave their society. And one who veered from this uniformity among them was judged with burning, just as they did to our forefather Abraham. And the "same words" can also be seen as the fact that they would kill whoever did not think like them.</p>	<p>נצי"ב, העמק דבר, בראשית יא</p> <p>ונעשה לנו שם. אנשים משגיחים וממונים על הדבר והיוו שרי צבא להעניש את העובר. דבל"ז אינו מועיל המגדל. כ"ז היה לחשש.</p> <p>פן נפוצ על פני כל הארץ אמנם יש להבין מה חששו אם יצאו כמה לארץ אחרת. ומובן שזה היה שייך לדברים אחדים שהיה ביניהם ובאשר אין דעות בנ"א שוים, חששו שלא יצאו ב"א מדעה זו והיו במחשבה אחרת, ע"כ היו משגיחים שלא יצא איש מישוב שלהם, ומי שסר מדברים אחדים שביניהם היה משפטו לשריפה כאשר עשו לא"א. נמצא היו דברים אחדים שביניהם לרועץ שהחליטו להרוג את מי שלא יחשוב כדעתם.</p>

d. FUNDAMENTALISM AND DIVERSITY (CCJU)

I define religious fundamentalism as the attempt to impose a single truth on a plural world. And that is why God responds to Babel by creating a multiplicity of languages, and hence a multiplicity of cultures and civilizations. That is why the key movement of the Bible is from universality to particularity. That is why at the beating heart of monotheism is the miracle that unity up there creates diversity down here.

And the rabbis in the second century in a document we call the *Mishnah*, chapter 4 of Sanhedrin, said it so beautifully: "When a human being mints many coins in the same mint they all come out exactly the same. God makes every human being in the same mint, in the same image, his image, and we all come out different."

And that is the point the Bible is making. If we read the Mosaic books carefully, we find a very strange phenomenon. I am sure you know the biblical command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." It appears how many times in the Hebrew Bible? It appears once, Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 18. The rabbis were very struck by that fact and they went through and counted them. And

I must tell you; I've counted them and I got the same answer. The Bible commands us in one place to love our neighbor, but in thirty six places to love the stranger. Why does it tell us thirty-six times to love the stranger? Because it's much harder to love a stranger than your neighbor.

e. ABRAHAM

And now we begin to understand why immediately after Genesis 11, the story of Babel and the attempt to impose an artificial unity on human diversity, comes the call to Abraham:

Abraham, leave your land, leave your birthplace, leave your father's house, leave all the places where everyone is like you, and travel to an unknown destination. Become a stranger in a strange land. Go and live a life that is different from the people all around you, different from the way the Mesopotamians live, different from the way the Egyptians live, different from the way your neighbors, the Canaanites and the Hittites, live. Go and be different.

Why did God tell Abraham to be different? It was to teach all humanity the dignity of difference. And friends, we now know, thanks to the entire environmental movement... that our entire ecology depends on biodiversity. And any loss of that diversity can have incalculable consequences. Cut down the rain forests and you get global warming.

f. Rabbi Sacks' Radical Theology (DOD page 55)

The radical transcendence of God in the Hebrew Bible means nothing more or less than that there is a difference between God and religion. God is universal, religions are particular. Religion is the translation of God into a particular language and thus into the life of a group, a nation, a community of faith. **In the course of history, God has spoken to mankind in many languages: through Judaism to Jews, Christianity to Christians, Islam to Muslims. Only such a God is truly transcendental greater not only than the natural universe but also than the spiritual universe articulated in any single faith, any specific language of human sensibility.**¹ How could a sacred text convey such an idea? It would declare that God is God of all humanity, but no single faith is or should be the faith of all humanity. Only such a narrative would lead us to see the presence of God in people of other faiths. Only such a worldview could reconcile the particularity of cultures with the universality of the human condition. This means that religious truth is not universal. What it does not mean is that it is relative.

There a difference, all too often ignored, between absoluteness and universality. I have an absolute obligation to my child, but it is not a universal one. Indeed it is precisely this non-universality, this particularity, that constitutes parenthood the ability to feel a bond with this child, not to all children indiscriminately. That is what makes love, love: not a generalized affection for persons of such-and-such a type, but a particular attachment to this person in his or her uniqueness.

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The God of Abraham teaches humanity a more complex truth than simple oppositions particular/universal, individual/state, tribe/humanity allow. We are particular and universal, the same and different. human beings as such, but also members of this family, that community, this history, that heritage. Our particularity is our window on to universality, just as our language is the only way we have of understanding the world we share with speakers of other languages. God no

¹ In the revised edition, this is changed to, "as Jews we believe that God has made a covenant with a singular people, but that does not exclude the possibility of other peoples, cultures and faiths finding their own relationship with God within the shared frame of the Noahide laws. These laws constitute, as it were, the depth grammar of the human experience of the divine: of what it is to see the world as God's work; and humanity as God's image. God is the God of all humanity, but between Babel and the end of days no single faith is the faith of all humanity."

more wants all faiths and cultures to be the same than a loving parent wants his or her children to be the same.

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Indeed, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is precisely the reason why the Israelites have to undergo exile and slavery prior to their birth as a nation. They have to learn from the inside and never lose the memory of what it feels like to be an outsider, an alien, a stranger. ... We encounter God in the face of a stranger.

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...at the beating heart of monotheism is that God is greater than religion; that He is only partially comprehended by any faith. He is my God, but also your God. He is on my side, but also on your side. He exists not only in my faith, but also in yours...²

What would faith be like? It would be like being secure in one's home, yet moved by the beauty of foreign places, knowing that they are someone else's home, not mine, but still part of the glory of the world that is ours.

g. Heresy?

1. The Guardian.

Chief rabbi accused of heresy over book

[Stephen Bates](#), *religious affairs correspondent*

Sat 26 Oct 2002 00.56 BST

The chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, was accused of heresy by one of the most senior leaders of the Jewish community yesterday, despite his attempts to head off orthodox criticism of his latest book for suggesting that no religion has a monopoly of truth.

The statement, in Hebrew, by Rabbi Elchonon Halpern, life president of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, insisted that Dr Sacks must not only make atonement for his "sin" but ensure the recall of all copies of the book, *The Dignity of Difference*, so that they could be destroyed.

The call is the strongest yet of a series from orthodox rabbis from all over the country for the chief rabbi to admit his error. He has already attended a meeting of rabbis from northern synagogues, and been told by others that his book represents a grave deviation from traditional and authentic Judaism.

What appears to have caused outrage is the book's suggestion that religions have something to learn from one another, and that God's message may not have been exclusive to any one group.

The book says: "In the course of history, God has spoken to mankind in many languages: through Judaism to Jews, Christianity to Christians, Islam to Muslims ... truth on earth is not, nor can it aspire

² In the revised edition, this is changed to, "the truth at the beating heart of monotheism is that God transcends the particularities of culture and the limits of human understanding. He is my God but also the God of all mankind, even of those whose customs and way of life are unlike mine."

to be, the whole truth ... in heaven there is truth, on earth there are truths. Therefore each culture has something to contribute."

In his statement of condemnation Rabbi Halpern, who has a synagogue in Golders Green, north London, refused to call Dr Sacks a rabbi, and warned other rabbis that they must speak out against him too or lose their authority.

Citing Proverbs 10:7 ("the name of the wicked will rot"), he declared: "He will not be forgiven for this sin until he makes proper atonement and recalls all copies of the book so that they may be completely destroyed as with all other heretical books.

"God forbid [that rabbis] should be suspected on account of their silence of agreeing with him and that there is some ambiguity."

The statement came as the London Beth Din - religious court - gave a qualified welcome to Dr Sacks's promise to remove "ambiguities" from the book when it is republished. The Beth Din said that the book was "open to an interpretation that is inconsistent with basic Jewish beliefs".

In an article for the Jewish Chronicle in which he attempted to explain himself, Dr Sacks insisted that he believed in the absolute truth and divine authorship of the Torah and its completeness as the totality of revelation, claiming that what he had written was based on principles central to the faith.

But he repeated his promise to rewrite sections of the book: "In future editions ... I will restate and reaffirm these points in less ambiguous phraseology ..."

2. Rabbi Sacks. Preface to the 2nd (revised) edition

the first edition [of the book] generated controversy within the Jewish community, some maintaining that certain passages could be understood in ways incompatible with Jewish belief. I believed I had guarded against this possibility by making it clear in the Prologue that I was writing as an orthodox Jew, implying that any interpretation incompatible with the classic tenets of Jewish faith was a misinterpretation.

In the event, the caveat proved insufficient. **Certain passages, especially in Chapter 3, were misunderstood. I therefore decided to restate them in less problematic terms. Since the core argument of the book is simple and, in Jewish terms, uncontroversial, I have redrafted it** in such a way as to circumnavigate all debated issues unrelated to its main thesis. For those wishing to study the theological background to Chapter 3, I have prepared a digest of biblical and rabbinic sources, available at our office website (www.chief Rabbi.org).

3. Prof Marc B. Shapiro. Of Books and Bans

<https://library.yct Torah.org/files/2016/09/Of-Books-and-Bans.pdf>

I do not intend to argue that Sacks' position is reflective of the main trend of rabbinic thought, for it certainly is not. But, as been demonstrated here, it is also the case that some precedent can be found even for his most radical statements. There is no question that he has gone beyond these earlier sources and offered a more complete theory of ecumenism than could possibly have been found in previous generations. One can certainly disagree with it, and I for one am not comfortable

with many aspects of Sacks's presentation, in particular his obvious enthrallment with multiculturalism. Yet, by the same token, haredi assertions that the Chief Rabbi's comments are a denial of a foundational Jewish belief also strike me as wide of the mark.

See also <https://traditiononline.org/universalism-and-particularism-in-the-jewish-tradition-the-radical-theology-of-rabbi-jonathan-sacks/>

Rabbi Sacks had already expressed the fundamental idea of this book in:

The Persistence of Faith (1991) Page 106

Religious extremism has brought us repeatedly to war and bloodshed. How many more lives must be lost before we are forced to the conclusion that God has created many faiths but only one world in which to live? The rabbis said that one who destroys a human life is as if he had destroyed a universe. In the late twentieth century the 'as if is terribly close. The destruction of the universe has become not metaphor but possibility.

I believe that our capacity to recognise the wholly Other that is God is measured by our ability to recognise the image of God that resides in the person who is not like us: the human wholly other. The Bible commands us only once to love our neighbour. But it never tires of urging us to love the stranger. To have faith in God as creator and ruler of the universe is to do more than to believe that God has spoken to us. It is to believe that God has spoken to others, in a language which we may not understand. After Babel, there is no one universal language which alone comprehends God, such that those who do not speak it are excluded from salvation, redemption or truth. Until that proposition frames our religious imagination, our faiths will contain devastating possibilities.

See also: Crisis and Covenant. Jewish Thought after the Holocaust (1992) Chapter 9 – The Tower of Babel, and specifically pgs 252-253

Acceptance of other religions?

Devarim ch.4

וּפָן-תִּשָּׂא עֵינֶיךָ הַשְּׁמַיְמָה וְרָאִיתָ אֶת-הַשָּׁמַשׁ וְאֶת-הַיָּרֵחַ וְאֶת-הַכּוֹכָבִים כֹּל צָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנִדְחַתָּ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לָהֶם וְעַבַדְתָּם אֲשֶׁר חָלַק יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֹתָם לְכָל-הָעַמִּים תַּחַת כָּל-הַשָּׁמַיִם:

And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them. **These the LORD your God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven**

Micah 4

וְשֹׁפֵט בֵּין עַמִּים רַבִּים וְהוֹכִיחַ לְגוֹיִם עֲצָמִים עַד-רָחוֹק וְכַתְּלוּ חַרְבֵיכֶם לְאֵתִים וְחִנִּיתֶיהֶם לְמִזְמְרוֹת לֹא-יִשָּׂאוּ גּוֹי אֶל-גּוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא-יִלְמְדוּן עוֹד מִלְחָמָה:

Thus He will judge among the many peoples, And arbitrate for the multitude of nations, However distant; And they shall beat their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up Sword against nation; They shall never again know war;

וְיִשְׁבוּ אִישׁ תַּחַת גִּפְנוֹ וְתַחַת תְּאֵנָתוֹ וְאִין מִחֲרִיד כִּי-פִי יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת דִּבֶּר:

But every man shall sit Under his grapevine or fig tree With no one to disturb him. For it was the LORD of Hosts who spoke.

כִּי כָל-הָעַמִּים יֵלְכוּ אִישׁ בְּשֵׁם אֱלֹהָיו וְאֲנַחְנוּ נֵלֵךְ בְּשֵׁם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

For all the peoples walk each in the names of its gods, We will walk In the name of the LORD our God Forever and ever.

Malakhi ch.1:11

כִּי מִמְזֶרֶח-שָׁמֶשׁ וְעַד-מְבֹאוֹ גְדוֹל שְׁמִי בְּגוֹיִם וּבְכָל-מְקוֹם מְקַטֵּר מִגִּשׁ לְשְׁמִי וּמִנְחָה טְהוֹרָה כִּי-גְדוֹל שְׁמִי בְּגוֹיִם אָמַר יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת:

For from where the sun rises to where it sets, **My name is honored among the nations,** and everywhere incense and pure oblation are offered to My name; for My name is honored among the nations—said the LORD of Hosts.

Rabbi Sacks. Halakhic Man in “Tradition in an Untraditional Age”

A sober analyst of the history of Jewish philosophy may conclude that its practitioners solved no ultimate problems; rather, they allowed certain personality types and mental frameworks to take their place in Judaism. The rationalist feels at home because of Maimonides; the anti-rationalist, because of Judah ha-Levi. R. Soloveitchik, in his philosophical writings, has answered no questions, but he has done what a great Jewish thinker should. He has given a home to the previously unhoused: to the Jew in the modern world who experiences conflict, loneliness and the sharp unease of faith.

<p>[92] R. Abraham Isaac Kook, <i>Orot</i>, p. 152, para. 2.</p> <p>The Holy One, blessed be He, dealt charitably with his world by not putting all the talents in one place, not in any one man or in any one nation, not in any one country, not in one generation or in one world; but the talents are scattered . . . The store of the special treasure of the world is laid up in Israel. But in order, in a general sense, to unite the world with them, certain talents have to be absent from Israel so that they may be completed by the rest of the world and the princes of the nations.</p> <p>Return to text</p>	<p>[צב] רא"י קוק ז"ל, אורות, קנב, סע' ב:</p> <p>צדקה עשה הקב"ה עם עולמו, מה שלא נתן כל הכשרונות במקום אחד, לא באיש אחד ולא בעם אחד, לא בארץ אחת, לא בדור אחד ולא בעולם אחד, כי אם מפוזרים הם הכשרונות . . . אוצר סגולת עולמים בישראל הוא גנוז. אבל כדי לאחד במובן כללי ג"כ את העולם עמם מוכרחים צדדי כשרונות מיוחדים להיות חסרים בישראל, כדי שיושלמו ע"י העולם, וכל נדיבי עמים.</p>
<p>[93] <i>Olat Riyah</i>, vol. 1, p. 387:</p> <p>Each people has its own purpose and destiny which constitutes its distinctive vocation and contribution to the perfection of the world. Each nation, through its character and attributes, ideas and history, has something unique which it bestows on humanity as a whole.</p> <p>Return to text</p>	<p>[צג] רא"י קוק ז"ל, "עולת ראייה" חלק א, עמ' שפז:</p> <p>אמנם כל העמים יש לכל אחד מהם מטרה ותעודה, המצטרפת בתור מקצע מיוחד הנצרך לתיקון עולם, שכל אומה מתיחדת בה, ע"פ תכונותיה, גזעה, ע"פ דעותיה וכח ההיסטורי שלה, ומנחלת למין אנושי כולו את קניניה הפרטיים.</p>

Particularism and Universalism

There is no contradiction, not even a conflict, between contributing to humanity and affirming our distinctive identity. *To the contrary, by being what only we are, we contribute to the world what only we can give.* (A Judaism Engaged with the World – June 2013 pg.24)

Judaism... is not for Jews alone. If it were, it would make no sense. The God of Abraham is not a tribal God. He is the creator of heaven and earth. The God of Israel is not only the God of Israel. He made all human beings in his image. The God of the Hebrew Bible did not limit his blessings to one nation. After the Flood, he made a covenant with all humanity. Abraham and his descendants are not the only people in the Bible to encounter God. Abraham's family are not the only moral heroes. So is Pharaoh's daughter. So is Job. The Israelites are not the only people to whom God sends prophets. So were the people of Nineveh to whom God sent Jonah. Through you,' said God to Abraham, 'all the families on earth will be blessed.' Future Tense Pg.231

Judaism was never meant for Jews alone. It contains a message for all humanity, and much in the twenty-first century will depend on whether this message or a different one prevails. Judaism belongs to the human conversation, and we must take the trouble to share our ideas with others, and let others share theirs with us. For a long time - most of history - this was simply not possible. The world was not interested in what the Jews had to say. Either they were there to be converted or assimilated, or they were 'the other' to be reviled.

That has changed, for two reasons. First, liberal democracies allow space for a multiplicity of voices. We all have a right to speak, and to do so in our own person. That is the glory of liberal democracy. Second, because of the existence of the state of Israel, Jews can speak on equal terms. No longer need they be haunted by the trauma of homelessness. (Future Tense, Pgs 7-8)