



The Challenge of the Religious Zionist Educator

For Rabbi Sacks, effecting change in the world always began with education. There were a number of core values found in Rabbi Sacks' thought that must be placed at the core of our Religious Zionist educational institutions.

Israel is central to the teachings of Rabbi Sacks. He often expressed his deep pride in Israel's history and achievements and found them to be a source of immense inspiration. For Rabbi Sacks, Jewish history was a source of faith in G-d, and no period more so than the story of the creation of the modern State of Israel: "It is difficult to reflect deeply on the rebirth of Israel without sensing the touch of heaven in the minds of men and women, leading them to play their parts in a drama so much greater than any individual could have executed, even conceived."¹ He would argue, I believe, that we must invest in teaching Jewish history, and that as a discipline, it belongs on the *kodesh* side of the curriculum of the Jewish day school.

But Israel plays a more significant role in his philosophy. In fact, it is central in his understanding of the national mission of the Jewish people. Israel is the place where Jews are summoned to create a society of justice and compassion under the sovereignty of G-d: "Judaism is the constitution of a self-governing nation, the architectonics of a society dedicated to the service of G-d in freedom and dignity. Without a land and state, Judaism is a shadow of itself."² This must be clearly articulated in a Religious Zionist curriculum. The ultimate expression and destiny of Judaism is to be lived in the Land of Israel.

For Rabbi Sacks, this national destiny, fulfilled in the Land of Israel by the creation of a model society, but also as individuals wherever they may be, is to embrace the "radical responsibility" to *Heal a Fractured World* (this is *tikkun olam*, repairing the world). Thus, the Judaism taught in our schools and experienced at our camps must be framed in this way, in both theoretical/philosophical terms, and in normative practical behavior.

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Jewish education should have a practical social activism component. It must not remain theoretical, remaining in books, classrooms, conversation or thought. It must leave the doors of the *Beit Midrash* and blaze a trail of healing in the world.

Finally, a Religious Zionist education must be brave and bold enough to be open, and willing not only to spend time outside of the *Beit Midrash* physically but intellectually and emotionally also. We must expose our students to the beauty and holiness found in the sciences and the arts: "*Chochma* is what allows us to understand the world as G-d's work (science) and the human person as his image (the humanities)."³

And we must allow room for the 'other' in our classrooms. This, for Rabbi Sacks, is the essence of the message of Judaism, and the core value at the heart of the Jewish national mission: "G-d, the creator of humanity, having made a covenant with all humanity, then turns to one people and commands it to be different *in order to teach humanity the dignity of difference.*"⁴

In summation, if a Religious Zionist education is to reflect the thought and values of Rabbi Sacks, it must be outward looking, engaged with the world, show compassion to the other and allow room for their narratives. It must present a Judaism concerned with redeeming the world, and provide practical skills and opportunities to fulfill this. And of course it must have Israel at its core, seeing it as the platform from which to actualize and fulfill the Jewish national mission.

1 *The Jonathan Sacks Haggada*, p. 53.

2 *Future Tense*, p. 135.

3 *Ibid.* p. 222.

4 *The Dignity of Difference*, p. 53.

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