

Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?

Jewish Continuity and How to Achieve It



Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

Jonathan Sacks

**WILL WE HAVE JEWISH
GRANDCHILDREN?**

JEWISH CONTINUITY AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

The Rabbi Sacks Legacy
Maggid Books

*Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?
Jewish Continuity and How to Achieve It*

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*To our dear children
Yoni, Danielle, Michal, Benji, Tali, and Yehuda,*

*Being your parents and having a close relationship with each of
you is one the greatest gifts Hashem has given us.
We treasure you individually and collectively.*

*We are so proud of what each of you represent –
strong and proud Jews who live lives full of Ahavat Yisrael,
Ahavat Torah, and Yirat Shamayim.*

*The unbroken chain of our Mesora is so fundamental to our
worldview and it has shaped the values we have sought to give you
throughout our lives. You have taken to heart the lessons imparted
by our parents and grandparents, and you,
G-d willing, will pass them on to your children and future
generations.*

*Our beracha to each of you is that you continue to develop
and flourish as passionate Jews and continue to walk in the
pathways of Hashem while adding your own unique contributions
to our family's heritage and Klal Yisrael for many generations
to come.*

*May your lives be blessed with an abundance of joy, health, love,
peace, prosperity, wisdom, hope, harmony, faith, kindness, success,
family, friendship, laughter, gratitude, forgiveness, renewal,
courage, unity, fulfillment, serenity, purpose, abundance, patience,
understanding, compassion, warmth, creativity, resilience, growth,
safety, generosity, clarity, and more.*

*Love,
Mommy and Abba*

Author's Original Dedication

*For Joshua, Dina and Gila –
our Jewish continuity*



The Rabbi Sacks Legacy perpetuates the timeless and universal wisdom of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks as a teacher of Torah, a leader of leaders and a moral voice.

Explore the digital archive, containing much of Rabbi Sacks' writings, broadcasts and speeches, or support the Legacy's work, at www.rabbisacks.org, and follow The Rabbi Sacks Legacy on social media @RabbiSacks.

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Publisher's Preface

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *zt"l* possessed and shared profound learning, moral depth, and sheer eloquence, expressed in his many published works. These made him a leading religious figure not only within contemporary Judaism but among people of all faiths (or none). Each meeting and conversation became a *shiur*, a lesson in how to look at the world and how to experience our relationship with the Creator.

It is a great privilege for us, paraphrasing the talmudic adage, “to return the crown to its former glory” by presenting these new editions of Rabbi Sacks’ earliest publications. The earlier volumes were written by Rabbi Sacks as a professor of philosophy, as a thinker, rabbinic leader, and Principal of Jews’ College, and are truly masterworks of exposition of contemporary Jewish thought. The later volumes represent Rabbi Sacks’ thinking as he became Chief Rabbi, set out his perception of the challenges facing his community of Anglo-Jewry at that time, and articulated his vision for the path ahead. All of these works certainly stand on their own merit today and are as relevant now as they were when first written.

We wish to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Becky and Avi Katz for their critical support of and partnership in this project. Becky and Avi are longtime communal leaders and supporters of Jewish education in North America and Israel, and on behalf of all of

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us at Koren, together with those who will cherish this new opportunity to be inspired by Rabbi Sacks' writings, thank you.

We wish to add our thanks to our colleagues at Koren who have worked on this series: Ita Olesker, Tani Bayer, Aryeh Grossman, and Rabbi Reuven Ziegler. The proofreading team included Debbie Ismail-off, Ruth Pepperman, Esther Shafier, and Nechama Unterman, and Marc Sherman updated the indexes of the volumes. We would also like to thank Lord Kestenbaum for his personal and insightful foreword to this volume. We extend deep gratitude to our friends at The Rabbi Sacks Legacy for their continued partnership, together with Lady Elaine Sacks and the rest of the Sacks family for their continued support for our work.

May Rabbi Sacks' memory and Torah continue to be a blessing for future generations.

Matthew Miller
Koren Jerusalem

Foreword

Lord Jonathan Kestenbaum

I first heard it exactly thirty years ago – and it happened on a walk in the English countryside. I had been recruited by Rabbi Sacks eighteen months earlier at the start of his Chief Rabbinate to be the first Chief Executive of his office. Over those eighteen months, we would talk intensively and often. Every day of every week of every month we would talk through his vision. And it became clear to me that he was developing a radical concept of community renewal, a concept which flowed in part from Rabbi Sacks stirring induction address when he took up his office in September 1991.

And so that countryside walk!

I would often walk with Rabbi Sacks when he was thinking through an idea – or more precisely, he would walk, and I would run to try and keep up with him! On this occasion, three decades ago, Rabbi Sacks' pace was particularly fast as he laid out to me his analysis of the Jewish condition in the 1990s, whilst also putting forward a vision of how to engage, excite and motivate the Jewish world. This vision was

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ultimately to become a rallying call for enhanced and meaningful engagement with Jewish life. And it was this which gave rise to *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?*

There was of course a global context to Rabbi Sacks' vision, as it was a time of great optimism. Not just the sense of historic opportunity that the end of the Cold War brought, but also a time of fresh thinking worldwide, which created a vibrancy in the public discourse. Global politics in general and the UK scene in particular were in an exciting state of flux, and that too created an environment for fresh thinking. Rabbi Sacks not only caught and rode that wave of optimism, but became the seminal catalyst for it in the Jewish world.

In so doing, Rabbi Sacks understood, perhaps better than most, the galvanising effect of an inspiring narrative – and how such narratives create the conditions for hope and for change. *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?*, with its intellectual rigor and compelling vision, became not only an antidote to the narrative of decline which in many quarters had preceded it, but went on to inspire a generation.

Indeed, it is hard to overstate the degree to which the narrative that sits at the heart of this book served to energise the community. Rabbi Sacks' argument at the time was that the Jewish world stands on the brink of a new era, as he put it – “from integration to survival to continuity.” And this new era will pose questions on how to sustain a vibrant Jewish life in an open, modern, secular society. This new era, according to Rabbi Sacks, will require radically new ways of thinking about Jewish engagement, and so the book became a clarion call for what Rabbi Sacks called “proud, knowledgeable, and committed Jews.” No less important, it helped shape the intellectual climate for debate – and this powerful combination of intellectual heft alongside community renewal made “Will we have Jewish grandchildren?” the defining question of the age. And indeed, of ages to come.

In the intervening thirty years, the questions that I have been asked more than any other are what impact did the book have and what were its enduring consequences?

I have thought about these questions often. It is clear to me that in some respects the book is a product of its time. It captures a mood

of opportunity, of generational change and of historical purpose. And it expresses these three things in inspirational terms. The vision which underpinned *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* also had a significant influence on the thinking which came thereafter. In particular on an entire generation of young educators, teachers, rabbis and community activists, who, thirty years on, are now in positions of pivotal leadership. Large numbers of them around the world continue to attribute their seminal influences to many of the principles set out by Rabbi Sacks in the book.

There is no doubt in my mind that in these intervening years, the structures and forms of community life have become considerably more vibrant, dynamic and diverse than they were before Rabbi Sacks came into office – and that such change emerged from his Continuity vision.

And yet.

Looking back, we may not have sufficiently anticipated the bruising, often merciless experience that comes with driving community-wide radical change. Perhaps the cross-community tensions all those years ago were also a product of their time, but even so, Rabbi Sacks' leadership of the Continuity agenda came at some personal cost to him as we worked to face down discordant voices. In structural terms, ultimately it was the merger of Jewish Continuity and another leading communal body which became one of the key organisational engines for Rabbi Sacks' vision, and which allowed him in turn the freedom to become the transcendent leader of his age.

In the years following the book's publication, there were and continue to be multiple signs of Jewish renewal across the UK – growth in Jewish schools, proliferation of adult Jewish learning, expansion of Jewish arts and culture, intensification of religious outreach – all were given a new lease of life. A fuller assessment will no doubt come with the passage of time, but it is clear that the infectious energy released by the book's publication was palpable.

Like so many others, not a day passes when I don't think of the impact Rabbi Sacks had on the Jewish world. And in so doing I think often of our earliest conversations – in particular that walk in the English countryside which gave rise to this book. It seems to me that

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Rabbi Sacks' vision in the pages to follow are as potent today as they were when first written in those heady days thirty years ago. To read it again is to be inspired afresh.

Lord Jonathan Kestenbaum
London
January 2024

Acknowledgements

This book has emerged, not from a merely theoretical inquiry but from an urgent practical concern: how to create a new organisation with the potential to transform a diaspora community, Anglo-Jewry, and set it on the road to renewal.

It is rare for a practical initiative to be launched by a book. In this case, however, in order for *Jewish Continuity* to succeed as an organisation we need to understand Jewish continuity as a concept, and the historical background which has made it suddenly problematic. In my thinking I have been helped by many individuals who have reflected on Anglo-Jewry and its needs, and I wish here to record my thanks.

My predecessor as Chief Rabbi, Lord Jakobovits, did much to prepare the groundwork. He established the Jewish Educational Development Trust in 1971 and his campaign, “Let My People Know,” placed education firmly on the Anglo-Jewish agenda.

My realisation that a new structure was needed for the 1990s originated in a conversation, three years ago, with Rabbi Shlomo Levin and Michael Cohen, two individuals who have done more than most to develop outreach and education in Anglo-Jewry.

Stanley and Carole Simmonds lent my family their lovely home in Jerusalem for the months preceding my taking up office, and it was

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there, overlooking the Old City, that the miracle of Jewish continuity and renewal captured my imagination. During my stay in Israel I had many conversations with Simon Caplan which began the process of evolving a practical strategy. Professor Seymour Fox, Alan Hoffman and Annette Hochstein of the Mandel Institute in Jerusalem lent their immense expertise in educational planning, and helped us to formulate the right questions.

All thinking on the future of Anglo-Jewry owes a special debt to Stanley Kalms and Fred Worms. The Kalms Report on the United Synagogue, *A Time for Change* (1992), and the Jewish Education Development Trust (JEDT) Report chaired by Fred Worms, *Securing our Future* (1992), provided detailed research on the current state of synagogue life and Jewish education, as well as imaginative prescriptions for change. Together, these two reports created the climate for a Continuity initiative, and our plans are set out against the backdrop of their conclusions.

The creation of a new organisation raises the spectre of battles for turf and territory. We were therefore fortunate to have, throughout, the support of the leaders of Anglo-Jewry's other major communal bodies. Sir Trevor Chinn and Cyril Stein of the Joint Israel Appeal, and Lord Young of Graffham and Michael Levy of Jewish Care, helped us think through the problems of launching a new communal structure and gave freely of their advice. Michael Phillips, chairman of the Jewish Educational Development Trust, was unfailingly generous in his encouragement, as were Seymour Saideman, President of the United Synagogue, and Judge Israel Finestein, President of the Board of Deputies. Alan Fox, Melvyn Carlowe and Morton Creeger gave valuable professional counsel.

We could not have set up *Jewish Continuity* without the efforts of Michael Mail and Syma Weinberg of the JEDT, who did much of the early professional work, as did Lira Winston of the Sinclair Montrose Trust and Rhoda Goodman of my office. Their dedication was exceptional.

No less remarkable was the help provided by a formidably gifted group of lay people, each of whom contributed to the thinking and momentum of the initiative. Among them were Richard Alberg, Michael Bradfield, Charles Corman, Tony Danker, Norman Finegold, Allan Fisher, Sidney Frosh, Professor Martin Gilbert, Michael Goldmeier, Barbara Green, Stephen Greenman, Henry Israel, Brian Kerner,

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To these must be added the many educators, rabbis, youth leaders and outreach workers from all sections of the Anglo-Jewish community with whom we consulted before setting up the organisation, and whose views further clarified our plans.

I am grateful to Frank Cass of Vallentine Mitchell for agreeing to publish this work, along with other studies in Jewish renewal, and to Teddy Reitman for assisting the publications of our office. The manuscript was read by, among others, Dayan Ivan Binstock, Charles Corman, Judge Israel Finestein, John Martin and Professor Leslie Wagner, all of whom offered valuable suggestions and criticisms.

Two individuals, though, stand out for the sheer weight of their contribution. The first is Jonathan Kestenbaum, Executive Director of the Office of the Chief Rabbi. *Jewish Continuity* is as much his creation as mine. Since we first met, six months before we took up our respective positions, we have been engaged in continuous dialogue about the theory and practice of Jewish renewal. Intuitively, in those early days, I sensed that we would need to create something like *Continuity*, and that Jonathan was the person to do it. He has exceeded even those high hopes, and brought the project to fruition with commitment and panache.

The second is Dr. Michael Sinclair, *Jewish Continuity*'s first chairman. Michael, a psychiatrist turned successful businessman, sat with astonishing calm throughout our first meeting as I asked him to create, from nothing, the biggest project in recent Anglo-Jewish history. After I had finished my lengthy exposition, he gave me his reply. It consisted of one word: Yes. I was not sure then whether he knew what he was letting himself in for, and perhaps neither was he. Ever since, he has not only

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allocated vast amounts of time to the project but, more importantly, he has lent it the colouring of his unique personality, inventive, receptive and creative, practical and intellectual at once, and driven throughout by a deep thirst for spirituality and personal Jewish growth.

Finally, I must acknowledge the role played by Clive Lawton, appointed as I was preparing this final draft to be *Continuity's* first Chief Executive. His colourful, unconventional approach to Jewish education augurs well for the future of the organisation as a source of innovation in Anglo-Jewry and as one that genuinely reaches out to Jews wherever they are.

May *Continuity's* success be their reward, and the renewal of Anglo-Jewry ours.

Jonathan Sacks
[1994]

Introduction

This book, the first I have written since becoming Chief Rabbi, is written with a sense of grave urgency.

In my most recently published book, *One People?*, I spoke about the three conflicts that currently divide the Jewish people, threatening to split it apart. One is the war of cultures between religious and secular Jews, which rages in Israel and flares up sporadically in Jewries elsewhere. Another is the slow separation of Israel and the diaspora, something we will notice increasingly in the coming years. The third, and the one which dominated the book, was the intractable schism between Orthodoxy and liberal interpretations of Judaism.

These were the conflicts which dominated the Jewish landscape when I wrote the book at the end of 1988. They were still there when I redrafted it shortly before my installation in 1991. They remain, and have not diminished since. But there is an ancient parable of the rabbis about Jewish history:

To what is it like? It is like a man who was travelling on the road when he encountered a wolf and escaped from it, and he went along relating the affair of the wolf. He then encountered a lion and escaped from it, and went along relating the affair of the lion.

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He then encountered a snake and escaped from it, whereupon he forgot the two previous incidents and went along relating the affair of the snake. So it is with Israel. The latter troubles make them forget the earlier ones.

A fourth problem has arisen which threatens to overwhelm all else and make other conflicts marginal by comparison. The great divide in the future will not be between secular and religious Jews, or between Israel and the diaspora, or between Orthodoxy and Reform. It will be between those who will remain Jews and those who will not.

Shimon Peres, Israel's Foreign Minister, put it simply on a recent visit to London. A few years ago, he said, Jews throughout the world were split over the question of "Who is a Jew?" Is a Jew one who has a Jewish mother, as halakha insists? Or is a Jew also one who has a Jewish father, as American Reform maintains? In the future, he said, we will have to adopt a third definition. A Jew will not be one who has a Jewish mother or father. *A Jew will be one who has Jewish children.*

He was referring to the dramatic rise of intermarriage in the diaspora. Within a generation, mixed marriage has escalated with a speed that has taken observers by surprise and it now threatens the very basis of Jewish survival in one community after another throughout the world. The Jewish family – two Jews who decide to marry, have Jewish children, and thus continue the Jewish heritage – has suddenly become fragile. As a result, the great chain of Jewish tradition, stretching across three-quarters of the history of human civilisation, is in danger of breaking. The future of diaspora Jewry is at risk.

This is not an overstatement. Anglo-Jewry, estimated at 450,000 Jews in the 1950s, now numbers barely 300,000. That means we have lost more than ten Jews a day, every day, for the last forty years. The significance of this is more than demographic. Certainly, it means that our community is shrinking, ageing and declining, but it means more than that. It means that young Jews are disengaging, disaffiliating and drifting away from Judaism. This is something that touches our very soul. Paul Johnson begins his monumental *A History of the Jews* with the sentence, "The Jews are the most tenacious people in history." That is true no longer. We are losing the collective will to live as Jews.

Fortunately, however, the Jewish people has never been led by behavioural scientists. We are a kingdom of priests, not an assembly of sociologists. We have never taken trends as inevitable, nor have we mistaken facts for commandments. We can, I believe, reverse the decline, but on two conditions. The first is that we understand our present situation. We must look at what is happening to young Jews and ask why. The second is that we summon the collective will to make good the shortcomings of contemporary Jewish life. They are many and deep.

Fortunately too, though we are a fractious people, crisis unites us. As the rabbis said: when it comes to the history of Jewish suffering, “The latter troubles make us forget the earlier ones.” The entire book of Genesis is taken up with arguments within the family, between husbands and wives, parents and children, and between siblings. But as soon as the book of Exodus begins, the Israelites are faced with exile and slavery, and for the first time we hear the phrase *am bnei Yisrael*, “the people of the children of Israel.” Earlier rivalries have been forgotten, and a divided family has become a united people.

We face crisis, a crisis of continuity. It can be defined by a simple question and a far from simple answer. The question is: *Will we have Jewish grandchildren?* The answer is: Yes – *if*. This book, and others I hope to write on the subject, are about the *if* of continuity.

It is not a single *if* because Jewish life has many dimensions. There is the community and its institutions and priorities. There is the Jewish home and the atmosphere of family life we construct. And there are the individuals who make up our families and communities. How they understand and live their Jewishness will have a bearing on how the next generation chooses to live theirs. Each of these dimensions is a crucial component of Jewish continuity and will affect whether it succeeds or fails. But they are different from one another and cannot be dealt with in the same language or frame of reference.

This book is about only one of these dimensions, the Jewish community. It asks what we must do *as a collective body* – as Anglo-Jewry – to ensure that our children will choose to live, marry and have children as Jews. It is less about identity and faith – things that concern us as families and individuals – than about communal strategy and priorities. I hope to write about these other perspectives, but not here.

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My argument is simple. We are entering a new era in modern Jewish history. The past two hundred years have been dominated, for Jews, by two concerns: *integration* into the societies of Europe and America, and *survival* against the onslaughts of antisemitism and the Holocaust. The 1990s will be seen in retrospect as the beginning of a new phase, one in which the predominant concern became the *continuity* of Jewish identity against the background of assimilation and intermarriage in the diaspora and secularisation in the State of Israel.

My belief is that just as Jews collectively succeeded in integrating and surviving, so we will succeed in renewing the bases of our continuity. But just as the first two challenges involved a profound struggle within the Jewish soul, so will the third. *Am Yisrael*, the Jewish people, derives its name from the moment when Jacob wrestled with an angel and was told that his name would henceforth be Israel, “for you have wrestled with God and with man and have prevailed.” Israel would be the people that had to engage in inner conflict before it could prevail. It still is.

The particular challenge facing us – in Anglo-Jewry, in the diaspora generally, and even in the State of Israel – is to determine whether or not Jewish identity can be sustained in an open, secular society. It can – but not without a determined effort to rebuild the vehicles, the transmitters, of Jewish continuity. For the past two hundred years, these have been neglected, because the battlefield was elsewhere. The greatest single danger is not that we do not know *how* to create continuity, but that we will fail to do so because we did not recognise that times have changed, and so too has the challenge. By continuing to fight yesterday’s battles, we risk losing the battle of today.

There must be a massive shift in our communal priorities and strategy. For this to happen, we must understand what is at stake, and what have been the transformations of Jewish life in our time. That is what this book seeks to explain. We must also understand what is old and what is new in the concept of continuity. In one sense, continuity is Judaism’s oldest challenge. Handing on a tradition, a way of life and an identity is what successive generations have done since the days of Abraham and Sarah, with a persistence that has no rival in the chronicles of human civilisation. But how to do so in an age in which Jewish identity has become weak, fragmented and confused is altogether more

difficult. It is a predicament which we have faced only rarely in our past. It is this that marks our time as a new era in Jewish history.

The task before us is part intellectual, part practical. We must understand. But we must also act. The rabbis of old were devoted to study. They spent their days arguing and analysing our sacred texts, and most of their nights as well. But they also said: "Great is learning for it leads to doing." Study is not an academic enterprise only. It is the preface to action, and therein lies its power.

If this is true of individuals, it is true of a community as well. Accordingly, though much in this book is taken up with reflection, it ends with a summons to collective action. It accompanies the launch of a new Anglo-Jewish organisation, *Jewish Continuity*, whose task will be to take the vision set forth in these pages and turn it into reality. This study is therefore more than a theoretical analysis. It is a prelude to a long and practical engagement with the greatest Jewish challenge of our time.

That challenge is defined by Alan Dershowitz at the end of his book *Chutzpah*:

We have survived – sometimes by the skin of our teeth – millennia of rape attempts against the Jewish body and soul by villains and monsters of every description. Efforts to convert us, assimilate us, and exterminate us by the sword have taken an enormous toll, but in the end they have failed. Now the dangers are more subtle: willing seduction, voluntary assimilation, deliberate abdication. We have learned – painfully and with difficulty – how to fight others. Can we develop Jewish techniques for defending against our own success?

That is the question. *Jewish Continuity* is our answer. Between the two, though, lies a journey, one that will force us to think about the very nature of Jewish existence now and against the backdrop of eternity. It begins with a mystery, perhaps even a miracle. What *is* Jewish continuity?

Chapter 1

The Miracle

In the Cairo Museum stands a giant slab of black granite known as the Merneptah stele. Originally installed by Pharaoh Amenhotep III in his temple in western Thebes, it was removed by a later ruler of Egypt, Merneptah, who reigned in the thirteenth century BCE. Inscribed with hieroglyphics, it contains a record of Merneptah's military victories. Its interest might have been confined to students of ancient civilisations, were it not for one fact: the stele contains the first reference outside the Bible to the people of Israel. What does it tell us about our ancestors and how they appeared to others? The inscription lists the various powers crushed by Merneptah and his army. It concludes:

All lands together, they are pacified;
Everyone who was restless, he has been bound
By the King of Upper and Lower Egypt....

Among those who were “restless” were a small people otherwise unmentioned in the early Egyptian texts. Merneptah or his chroniclers believed that they were now a mere footnote to history. They

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had not simply been defeated. They had been obliterated. This is what the stele says:

Israel is laid waste, his seed is not.

*The first reference to Israel outside the Bible is an obituary notice. Ironically, so is the second. This is contained in a basalt slab dating from the ninth century BCE which today stands in the Louvre. Known as the Mesha stele, it records the triumphs of Mesha, king of Moab. The king thanks his deity Chemosh for handing victory to the Moabites in their wars, and speaks thus: "As for Omri, king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years, for Chemosh was angry with his land. And his son followed him and he also said, 'I will humble Moab.' In my time he spoke thus, but I have triumphed over him and over his house, while *Israel has perished forever.*"*

The story of Jewish survival is so strange, unique and vast that it strains our imagination to the limit. Even the events of a single century, our own, defy sober description. The twentieth century of the Common Era – the fifty-seventh century, Jewish time – witnessed the most brutal, systematic assault on the Jewish people since ancient times: the Third Reich's Final Solution in which the whole of European Jewry was scheduled for destruction and in which six million Jews, one third of world Jewry, perished. Yet, the Jewish response to the Holocaust has been the rebirth of the State of Israel, the restoration of Jewish sovereignty after a lapse of nineteen hundred years and the ingathering of Jews from more than seventy countries to their ancestral home.

More than 3,000 years ago Moses, at the end of his life, addressed the assembled Israelites in the desert. They had not yet crossed the Jordan. Their history as a people in their own land had not yet begun. In world terms, they were an insignificant group of erstwhile slaves, a potential irritant to other powers but no more. Nonetheless, as he reviewed the events that they had lived through, Moses was convinced that this people and its story would endure to the end of time. He foresaw no comfortable destiny for his people. When he turned to the future, he did not speak of a mighty civilisation, economically strong and militarily invincible. Moses' speech is entirely free of the triumphalism that marks the records of other leaders of the ancient world. Israel, he predicted,

would remain a tiny people. It would frequently be at the mercy of greater powers. It would be led astray by affluence. Its people would lose the one thing that made them different, even remarkable: their faith in and dedication to God. They would suffer defeats and exile and persecution. But they would remain distinctive. They would endure. And one day, “Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens,” God would bring them back.

At the very beginnings of their national history Moses recognised that there would never be any other people quite like Israel. Turning to the new generation, he asked them a rhetorical question:

For ask now of the days past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from one end of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?

That question still echoes, gathering force with each successive century.

Today, as the twentieth century draws to its close and as we stand as if on a mountain peak surveying the breathtaking landscape of Jewish history, we know this: that those who sought to destroy the people of the covenant gather dust in the museums of mankind while *am Yisrael chai*, the people Israel lives. Ancient Egypt is no more. The Moabites have long since disappeared. The Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans successively strode the stage of world dominion. Each empire played its part, said its lines, and each in turn has gone. In our day, the two great powers which declared “Israel is laid waste, his seed is not” – the Third Reich and the Soviet Union – have been defeated, dismantled and have disappeared. But the Jews survive. “Ask now of the days past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth... whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?”

WITNESSES

Perhaps we are too close to appreciate to the full the majestic, improbable persistence of the Jewish people. We speak, after all, of *our* people, our grandparents and theirs back across the generations. Wonders are