

**CHIEF RABBI SIR JONATHAN SACKS
SPEECH AT RALLY AT JFS SUNDAY 23 JULY 2006**

Sing: Esa einay el heharim

Speech:

We have come together today
To stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Israel
And to say a simple prayer.
Ribbono shel olam,
Let your people Israel live in peace.
Let there be an end to bloodshed and violence.
Let there be an end to hostility and hate.
Let Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev come home.
Let Israel's defence forces come home.
What else did Your people ever want,
Except the right to live with security, without fear, in peace?
Almighty G-d, let your people Israel live in peace.

Today we stand in solidarity with Israel,
And rarely have I felt so proud of Anglo-Jewry as I have done these past few
days.
Especially of our young people.
Last week 1300 of them, from youth groups right across the religious spectrum,
Went out to Israel.
Every one of them, or their families, might have said: no. Not now. It's too
dangerous.
Yet almost none of them did.
I want to say to every one of those young people: Kol hakavod. You make us
proud.

And today I want a message to go forth from us to Israel to say: Israel, you make
us proud.
In a mere 58 years, in a country half the size of Lake Michigan, you have done
things that are unbelievable.
You have gathered together Jews from more than a hundred different countries
speaking more than eighty different languages and out of them made a great
nation.
You have taken a land with no natural resources and turned it into one of the
great economies of the modern world.
You have created a democracy in a part of the world where no one thought it
possible.
You have taken a desolate land and made it blossom and bear fruit.
You have developed medical technologies to save life.

Wherever in the world there has been a natural disaster, you have been among the first to offer humanitarian aid.
Through six decades under almost continuous threat you have given the world poets and philosophers and musicians and novelists whose heart is Jewish and whose love is for all humanity.
You have taken the language of the Bible and made it speak again
You have taken a people from the valley of the shadow of death and made it live again
You have taken hope itself – hatikvah shnot alpayim – and made it breath again.
Israel: you are our people and our pride and we stand with you today.

Why then does a people who have consistently said Yes to life and No to death,
Who have consistently said Yes to peace and No to terror,
Find itself today fighting in Lebanon and Gaza?
The answer is so simple, yet so unbelievable, that we must hear it clearly and unequivocally:
Israel is fighting today in Lebanon because 6 years ago it withdrew from Lebanon.
Israel is fighting today in Gaza because 1 year ago it withdrew from Gaza.
And Israel discovered the terrible truth spoken by the late Mother Theresa
That no good deed goes unpunished.
Every gesture of goodwill undertaken by Israel has been seized on by its enemies as a sign of weakness.
Every Israeli effort towards peace has led without exception to an increase in violence against Israel.
The Oslo Peace Process led directly to the first Palestinian suicide attacks in Israel.
Taba: the most generous offer Israel ever made to the Palestinians, led directly to the most concerted set of terrorist attacks against any nation in modern history.
The Gaza Withdrawal, the most painful act Israel has ever had to undertake, led within less than a year to 1000 Kassam rocket attacks on Israeli civilian targets including schoolchildren.
And finally the Lebanon withdrawal, undertaken by Israel six years ago in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 425. That resolution was immediately broken by Hizbullah, about which the United Nations special envoy to Lebanon warned at the time, in November 2000: “Such breaches of international peace and security in the south threaten to ignite a new spiral of violence with tragic consequences for the civilian population.”
That failure led in 2004 to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 which called categorically for the disarming of militias in Lebanon. Again rejected. This time Kofi Annan himself protested to the Syrians. The effect? The arming of Hizbullah with weapons that threaten the very heart of Israel.
Israel withdrew from Lebanon.
Israel does not want to be in Lebanon.
It does not want to do any of the things it is now doing.
It accepted in good faith the commitment of the United Nations that it would not have to.

It is acting today only because the international community has failed to ensure that its neighbours met their obligations when Israel met hers.
Israel, the Israel we know and love, is a people that pursues peace, yearns for peace, sings about peace, *needs* peace.
For 58 years it has done everything a nation could do in pursuit of peace, and it has been rewarded instead with violence and terror.
It has done what the world has asked it to do, and the result has been that it has been left vulnerable and alone.

Which of us does not weep when we see the news day after day?
Does any of us, God forbid, take satisfaction at the devastation of Lebanon?
Is that who we are?
Let me be clear and unambiguous.
We weep not just for Israel
But for the people of Lebanon also.
Lebanon was once a great country,
A centre of civilization
A beacon in the Middle East --
Until Jordan drove the Palestinians out of Jordan into Lebanon
Until Syria used them to terrorise the Lebanese
Until Iran armed and funded and manipulated them;
Until the whole country of Lebanon, every man, woman and child, became a hostage.
And so a great country was destroyed and reduced to ruins.
And today Israel is fighting in Lebanon so that Israel should not become, G-d forbid, another Lebanon,
As any country in the world will become
If it lacks the clarity and courage to say No to terror and Yes to peace.

Tragically Jews have learned over the centuries
That when their enemies speaking of killing them, driving them into the sea, wiping them off the face of the earth, they mean what they say.
What Hizbullah and Hamas have said in word and deed is:
We will kill you if you stay
And we will kill you if you leave.
We will kill you if you retaliate
And we will kill you if you don't retaliate.
What can Israel do but to seek to end the terror
That threatens and is meant to threaten its very existence?
When alone among the 192 nations that make up the United Nations, after 58 years it still finds its very right to exist denied?

Friends, let me tell you what is wrong with terror. It is not just that it murders the innocent: the young, the old, the defenceless, the uninvolved.
It is that it murders innocence itself.
It turns virtue into weakness, decency into vulnerability.
And if we, if Israel, if Europe, if America do not take a stand against terror, if we ignore it as the world ignored it for so long,

then it will leave a stain on the human future that no tears, no regrets, will ever remove.

The battle Israel is fighting today is not for itself alone.
It is for the sake of all those who say no to terror
No to the desecration of life
No to killing in the name of God
Whether they live in Bali or Beslan, or Madrid or Mumbai.
And therefore let me end with simple words of prayer:

Ribbono shel olam: Be with your people Israel now.
Hear their cry
Heed their tears
Listen to this, our prayer on their behalf.
Grant peace to all your children, Jew, Christian and Muslim alike.
Help us live together, respecting one another.
Help us cherish life.
Help us to use the powers You gave us, to heal, to mend, to build.
We ask of You, Almighty God, just one thing:
You who make peace in high places,
Help us make peace down here on earth.

Sing: Oseh shalom bimromav.