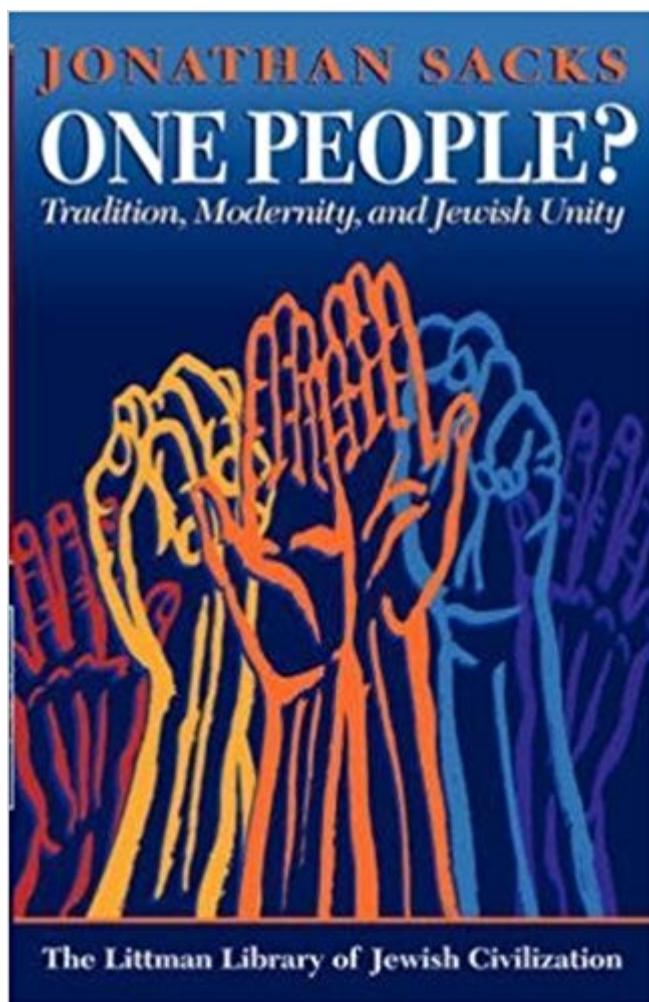


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# One People?: Tradition, Modernity And Jewish Unity (Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization)



## **Synopsis**

One People? is the first book-length study of the major problem confronting the Jewish future: the availability or otherwise of a way of mending the schisms between Reform and Orthodox Judaism, between religious and secular Jews in Israel, and between Israel itself and the diaspora-all of which have been deepened by the fierce and continuing controversy over the question of 'who is a Jew?' One People? is a study of the background to this and related controversies. It traces the fragmentation of Jewry in the wake of the Enlightenment, the variety of Orthodox responses to these challenges, and the resources of Jewish tradition for handling diversity. Having set out the background to the intractability of the problems, it ends by examining the possibilities within Jewish thought that might make for convergence and reconciliation. The Chief Rabbi employs a variety of disciplines-history, sociology, theology, and halakhic jurisprudence-to clarify a subject in which these dimensions are inextricably interwoven. He also explores key issues such as the underlying philosophy of Jewish law, and the nature of the collision between tradition and modern consciousness. Written for the general reader as much as the academic one, this is a lucid and thought-provoking presentation of the dilemmas of Jewish Orthodoxy in modernity.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

'We are indebted to Rabbi Sacks for presenting us with a closely reasoned argument helping the

modern Orthodox Jew resolve the dilemma of wanting to live with his non-observant neighbours with mutual respect, and at the same time retaining his unqualified commitment to his faith in Tora min Hashamayim and all that that implies.' Mendell Lewittes, Jerusalem Post Magazine 'Any sense of *deja vu* is soon eclipsed by the increased tightness and depth of the argument, apparent not least in the uncanny way in which any counter-argument is either anticipated or raised and dealt with later in the text . . . There is thus scope for much future discussion. This book makes its case against a deftly woven background of the history, sociology, theology and Halakha of the past two centuries. Its argument is brilliantly sustained through its compelling paradoxes which at times illuminate and at times provoke . . . Sacks has confronted the questions which most profoundly trouble contemporary Jewish existence. His book redraws the conceptual field in which the arguments will continue even if it is unlikely to end them. This is no small contribution.' Michael Gillis, Jewish Quarterly 'An intellectual and philosophical feast of scholastic diplomacy. Diplomat par excellence, Sacks seeks to forge bridges over the seemingly unbridgeable chasms separating Orthodoxy, Progressive Judaism and Jewish secularism, as well as within Orthodoxy itself . . . a masterly exercise which, it is hoped, will not fall on the deaf ears of a Jewry too divided to love itself . . . a valiant attempt to occupy the pivotal middle ground of Jewry-a stance which demands courage in an age such as ours which favours extremism. Let us hope that all sections of Jewry will accept the hand of friendship and understanding stretched out to them by Sacks so that maybe one day we just might become One People.' Jewish Telegraph 'Jonathan Sacks has had the courage to elaborate a major constituent of his personal credo before the public gaze . . . it is not dispassionately reasoned but is an expression of a devout commitment to the cause of unity . . . Even if Jonathan Sacks has raised more questions than he has answered, if we are prepared to address these questions to ourselves, he has thereby rendered a service to each of us, and so let us hope, to all of us, what he calls the "covenantal community", *keneset Yisrael*.' Ephraim Borowski, *Le'Ela* 'Sober, realistic, even optimistic. It is also splendidly written, closely reasoned and meticulously documented . . . All of us can-and should-accept that the Chief Rabbi's motives are good.' John Rayner, Jewish Chronicle His approach marks a refreshing change from those engaged in theological backbiting, and it bears out his desire to seek reconciliation between the different creeds of Judaism . . . Chief Rabbi Sacks is to be praised for opening up the process of reconciliation within Anglo-Jewry in a reasoned and dignified manner.' Jonathan Romain, Jewish Chronicle 'A tour de force. Brilliantly documented and skilfully presented, it looks honestly at the Jewish experience of the past in order to find a resolution to the problems that today threaten the Jewish people with dissolution. Rabbi Sacks asserts in the preface that, "in writing about Liberal,

Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaisms, I have tried to come to terms with positions that are fundamentally not my own." He is, I believe, the first Orthodox rabbi in a position of authority ever to do so, and for this he deserves our praise . . . One People? is essential reading for all who wish to establish the basis for a constructive dialogue between the various religious sections in Jewry . . . for those who truly love Klal Yisrael, his is the only reasonable way forward.' Sidney Brichto, Jewish Chronicle 'It is admirable that an Orthodox Chief Rabbi should be searching-with halachic backing-for ways of uniting all Jewish factions.' Stefan Reif, Jewish Chronicle 'His analysis of contemporary orthodoxy, which constitutes the bulk of the book, is recommended, especially for non-traditional or secular Jews who wish better to understand an observant Jew's perspective on the diverse Judaisms of modernity.' A. J. Avery-Peck, Choice

Jonathan Sacks is Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. Educated at the University of Cambridge, he was formerly Principal of Jews College, London, and 1990 BBC Reith Lecturer.

I liked this book. It addresses in a thoughtful manner many of the problems which we see in our people.

In this book, Sacks (the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain) focuses on how Orthodox Jews should relate to Reform Judaism (and to a lesser extent, other liberal Jewish movements; Sacks focuses on Reform because it is the oldest non-Orthodox denomination, and because it differs more sharply from Orthodoxy than does Conservative or Reconstructionist Judaism). Sacks sketches out three options: exclusivism (that is, treating non-Orthodox Jews as if they were Christians), pluralism (treating other Jewish movements as equally valid), and what he calls "inclusivism"- treating rival Jewish movements as partially but not completely valid. Sacks endorses the latter, middle, course, asserting that pluralism is impractical because Reform (and to a lesser extent, other Jewish denominations) reject the binding character of traditional Jewish law, and thus create unbridgeable gaps between Orthodoxy and its rivals. Sacks also explains the differences among Orthodox Jews, focusing on the concept of "aggadic pluralism." Sacks explains that even though Orthodox Jews may abide by the same day-to-day religious law (or halacha) there is no uniform Orthodox position on matters outside halacha - for example, what the stories in Genesis mean, or the theological implications (if any) of the Holocaust. I thought his discussion of this issue was valuable for both non-Orthodox and Orthodox Jews (both of whom occasionally mistake the position of one or two

rabbis or intellectuals with the "Orthodox position"). I think this book is an excellent guide to the differences among Jews, and would recommend it to anyone mystified by 20th-century Judaism.

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