

CONDOLENCE MOTION

Moved by: Councillor James Pasternak

Seconded by: Councillor Mike Colle

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on Saturday, November 7, 2020.

An acclaimed author, philosopher, theologian, broadcaster, but perhaps best known as the former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, and later a member of the House of Lords in the Parliament of the U.K, Rabbi Sacks had a profound influence advocating for inclusiveness in the realm of both intra and inter-faith dialogue.

While many recall Rabbi Sacks for his ideas and teachings, he understood that just as important as the substance of his teachings was the way he communicated them. Understanding this early on in his career, Rabbi Sacks honed his communication skills and style, which shaped him into the engaging and captivating speaker that so many would know him to be. Communicating effectively would be just one piece of the puzzle, Rabbi Sacks knew that in dialogue, you need to meet people where they were, and he applied that understanding to bring people together. His official title of Chief Rabbi would have him oversee Orthodox denominations, yet he used his platform to reach across the spectrum to reform and conservative Jewish denominations. Though the tall order of officially and unofficially representing a diverse Jewish community was not without its challenges and tensions, Rabbi Sacks often tried to find common understanding between liberal and conservative factions of the British Jewish population. In this regard, Rabbi Sacks noted that “there are many great Jewish leaders. There are very few great Jewish followers. So leading the Jewish people turns out to be very difficult”

In addition to authoring over 20 books, Rabbi Sacks spoke regularly about the threat of anti-semitism to diverse audiences, including elementary and middle schools, university classes, as well as the European Parliament and the Vatican. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair noted that Sacks “had the rarest of gifts — expressing complex ideas in the simplest of terms” and added that Rabbi Sacks was “a man of huge intellectual stature but with the warmest human spirit.”

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy to Rabbi Sacks’ family and friends.

November 25, 2020