

Good Afternoon!

We are in the midst of Chanukah and the week of פרשת מקץ, both are about the interaction of the Jewish people (Hebrews in the case on the פרשה) with the dominant culture of the time. This makes both events very relevant to our contemporary lives.

Here in the US, we too face a similar challenge of interacting with the dominant western culture which is all around us. The ancient conflict between Athens and Jerusalem stills plays out in our contemporary experience. Making it more complex, is the fact that it is not an either-or proposition, but rather the right way to synthesize both world views.

A close look at the history of the struggle of Maccabees, and the midrashim about the Hebrews experience in Egypt, suggests that even then, the struggle was more nuanced than the We vs. They story, we have been taught in our early schooling.

We consider ourselves “The Chosen People” (אתה בחרתנו), but in reality today in the US we are “The Choosing People”. You have a legitimate choice on how Jewish you want to be, and society at large, will accept and respect your choice.

The book we present here today is an attempt to help you make the right choice, by answering the question: Why bother being Jewish?

This is not the first book that attempts to address the question, but it does use a unique approach in addressing the question. The classic Apologetic approaches, whose best example is R. Yehuda Halevy's The Cuzari, focus on theology, and try to prove the veracity of Judaism and its claims, as they are manifested in the bible.

In “Letter in the Scroll”, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks uses an Anthropological rather than Theological approach. He is trying to validate the Jews more so than Judaism.

The main premise of the book is, that as part of the Jewish people you are a participant in a very old and successful “Counter Culture Protest Movement”. A movement against the prevailing powers throughout our long history. This movement is responsible for many of the very important Ethical and Moral achievements of humanity, like human dignity, equality before the law, right over might, social justice, and many more. In spite of our successes, there is still a long way to go, so you too, should be able to continue finding meaning in this journey. (the original name of the book in the UK is “Radical then, Radical now”)

This book challenges you, teenagers who naturally have Counter-Culture tendencies, to use Judaism as the tool for a meaningful lifelong pursuit of a better self and a better world.

Read the book, share it with friends and parents, we are confident it will enhance your lives, it did ours!

Chanukah Same'ach!