Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and Lord Daniel Finkelstein in Conversation

- Good evening, everybody, and welcome back. I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Rabbi Sacks and Daniel Finkelstein, who will be discussing Rabbi Sacks' new book, "Morality." Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 30 books, and a moral voice of our time. Described by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales as a light unto this nation, he's a frequent and respected contributor to radio, television, and the press, both in Britain and around the world. Admired by non-Jews as much as Jews, by secular as well as religious thinkers, and equally at home in the university and the yeshiva, Rabbi Sacks holds 18 honorary degrees and has been awarded numerous prizes in recognition of his work, including the 2016 Templeton Prize. He served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 until 2013, and read philosophy at Cambridge before pursuing postgraduate studies at New College, Oxford, and Kings College London. Welcome, Rabbi Sacks.

Now I'd like to introduce Lord Daniel Finkelstein, who we have met before, OBE. He is a former politician and currently associate editor of "The Times." He's also a leader, writer, and weekly political columnist. Before joining "The Times" in 2001, he was advisor to both Prime Minister John Major and Conservative leader William Hague. He is the former chairman of Policy Exchange and was elevated to the House of Lords in August 2013. Thank you very much, both of you, for joining us, and I will now hand the floor over to you.

- I'm sorry. Sorry, Wendy. Thank you very much indeed. It is wonderful to have a chance to celebrate your birthday with one of my favourite activities, which is being in discussion with Lord Sacks, with Jonathan Sacks, who is all the things that you describe him and more. So I'm going to start, dive straight in as you've given us such a generous introduction.

I suppose, given that the theme of your latest book and much of your thinking is the relationship between the state and individual morality and our ability as voluntarily to commit ourselves to collective good, that what's happened in the last few months with COVID-19 has prompted a lot of new thoughts, reflections. Do you feel it's strengthened the thesis of your book, undermined it in certain ways, altered your perspective?

- I could not imagine, Daniel, that the fundamental thesis would've been more clearly demonstrated. And I'd love to talk this through a little bit. If you have a look at the two countries in the world that have done worst on the virus, the two countries in the world that have the highest death toll, they are the United States and the United Kingdom, the two most individualistic societies on the face of the earth. In fact, the two most individualistic societies almost in history. So the I has been devastatingly bad in terms of the ability of those two countries to deal with the medical issues.

Now, I don't want us to move in the opposite direction, but the classic case here is China, which is an ultimate we society in which the individual is always subsidiary to the system. But China

was able to get a grip on this, and now has the lowest rate in the world of new cases. Obviously, I'd point towards other strongly we societies, like for instance, Singapore, Taiwan. South Korea did exceptionally well. And Elaine and I were in New Zealand back in November of last year, and we discovered what a strongly we society that is because it's got a very small population that needs to work together very strongly.

People need to help one another. And they've done exceptionally well. They're the first virus-free environment I think anywhere. So the we's have been successful. The I's have been unsuccessful. And you can see that more specifically in specific behaviour. If you go all the way to the we, that's not the answer. That's really not the answer because look at what China did by hushing up the news initially, by silencing whistleblowers, and by doing all sorts of things. For instance, China may have gone a long way further than even it had ever gone before on individual surveillance. And I think there's a lot of worry there.

So you go all the way to we, you completely lose liberal democracy. That doesn't exist if you move in that direction. But if you move all the way to I, again, there's total chaos. Daniel, could you explain to everyone what actually happened when the prime minister's senior advisor made his little trip? Because I'm not sure how far that got to America. Could you just tell us the story?

- Yes. So there had already been some discussion about what the consequences should be for people who were leading government roles who broke with lockdown rules. And the chief medical officer for Scotland had had to resign, I think deputy chief, actually, after visiting her second home. That was against regulations. And one of the key scientists, Neil Ferguson, had also resigned from his position as an advisor to the government because he had been allowing his girlfriend to come to visit his house when she was from another household.

And then it was revealed that the prime minister's chief advisor, senior counsellor, Dominic Cummings, had not done the same thing, because in both of the other two cases, there were some questions about social distancing and whether they'd broken that. But he'd travelled to his parents' farm and stayed in a place there. And there was some further rumours, later substantiated, that he'd also taken a trip to a nearby tourist attraction.

And this, the government chose to defend that, not as it might've done, as a lapse in conduct, which should be punishable but not possibly with resignation. They chose to defend it as being in concert with the lockdown rules. And this was infuriating for a lot of people. So it did... I mean, this is a subject you and I have discussed often. It illustrated people's immense sense of fairness attached to reciprocity. There was a feeling, wasn't there, that everyone was putting in this huge effort, government, and government figures were not doing the same thing. They were sort of taking out what everyone else was putting in effectively. And that produced a political blow from which the government's reputation is still reeling, actually.

- I'll tell you what I saw on the ground, which is, until that day, until he gave the press conference and refused to apologise, people round us in the parks in the Hampstead Heath near us had all

obeyed social distancing rules. The next day, after he'd refused to apologise, we saw breach after breach after breach of those distancing rules. It's as if they were saying, look, if the prime minister's senior advisor can get away with it, so can we.

In other words, this was a classic case of people saying, I'll do what is in my interest, not what is in society's interest. And so I've seen the thesis of the book illustrated with unbelievable power. It wasn't prophetic. It just happened this way. But I think this is telling us that Britain and the United States have gone too far down the road of I. And the only way of preserving the we without Chinese-type totalitarianism is for us to do the we ourselves by being moral human beings who care about the common good.

- That certainly does... Certainly, a lot of things have corroborated your thesis. But I wonder about this one thing, which is obviously a big theme of the book is we can do all this without the state or and we'll have to, partly for the China reasons, but just partly because we don't want and can't afford to pay for everything.

So some people who'd be critical of that thesis from the left say would say that underestimates the reliance we've had to put on the state for two things. The first is, as the coordinating body, this was not a voluntary coordination, that it had to be led from the top. And indeed, as you correctly said, the moment people felt it wasn't being led from the top, it began to crumble. And the second thing is it's sustained by a massive borrowing campaign which the state can sustain if individuals can't.

So while it may have increased the we, the strength of we against I, what do you think about the challenge it might pose to that aspect of your thesis?

- I've never knocked the state. I've knocked exclusive reliance on the state and the market to get us where we want to be. The state has never been more important than it is today and will be for the next decade as country after country engages in the work of rebuilding what has been lost. The state is absolutely vital. But there's something else which is no less vital, which is society. Society doesn't use mechanisms of power, but it uses mechanisms of belonging.

We're all in this together. And one thing that has been clear in the United States with all the race riots has been that the sense of we are all in this together has almost totally vanished. And that instead what we have is a whole range of minorities, many of whom feel, and I think quite justifiably feel, that they have suffered disproportionately. There's no doubt, for instance, that the Black community in the United States has suffered threefold blow. Number one, they've died in disproportionately large numbers. Number two... I mean, from the virus. Number two, they've been hit by the economic recession more than others.

Until then, until, I don't know if you noticed this, Dan, that until February or March of this year, the Black community's average income was rising faster than the white communities. So they were doing unprecedentedly well and they've now received this body blow. And of course, they

suffer disproportionately from police brutality. Now somehow or other, the kind of voices, like Martin Luther King, were always saying, "We're all in this together." He was aligning himself with white America by saying, "We're all part of the same family. We all believe in the same things. Therefore, let's act on the principle that we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal." That was a Martin Luther King approach. And I think we're losing out on this. America and Britain are becoming very, very divided societies. So the state is important, but a society is equally important.

- Can I ask you about the impact that this might have on religion? One, of course... I mean, and we'll take Judaism as an example, or maybe the even. On the one hand, there has been this quite prominent renewal of the spirit of we because everyone's had to live in... Even when people were banging their pots on a Thursday night to support the care workers, a lot of that was about coming out and seeing your neighbours. Sometimes people in cities who never met their neighbours have now done so.

And so on the one hand, there's been a rise of the community spirit, which definitely relates and sustains religion. On the other hand, of course, the synagogues have been empty because people haven't been able to come. And that, over time, weakens the function of communities that gather together informally and form friendships that sustain religious worship. Are you more optimistic or more pessimistic about religion, starting with Judaism, but of course broadly to whatever you want, as a result of what's happened?

- Discovered, made two religious discoveries just as a result of Zoom. Number one is, just by pressing a button, you can mute a rabbi. People have been waiting for this for thousands of years. Second thing I've noticed is, every so often, a message comes across my screen saying, "Your connection is unstable," which is a general description of me at prayer, you know? I'm always trying for a connection with Heaven, but sometimes the connection is unstable.

There's no doubt that community spirit has hugely increased as people right around the country have been reaching out to neighbours where they're helping them, buying food for them, getting medicines for them, just phoning them or WhatsApping them to see how they're doing. It's very beautiful. It's a very interesting law in Judaism that if you want a minyan, if you want a community, you can't do it by Zoom. You have to be physically present in the same place. And a lot of my book on morality is saying how important face-to-face I-Thou encounters actually are. Wonderful though social media may be, and they've been a godsend, they really have in this recent few months, but religion is about coming together, because if I can come close to the physical you, I hope I can come close to the metaphysical you with a big Y.

And I think we've all been starved. I feel spiritually starved despite the fact that, courtesy of the media, I've been able to reach out right across the world in a way that I could never have done before. The Jewish community around the world has really organised itself for global seminars on this, meetings on that, and it's been incredible. But you cannot replace the I-Thou encounter that happens when we're face-to-face.

- Would you... Well, actually, I'd like to broaden out a little bit just from COVID and talk about your thesis in regard to other different trends. One of them is the rise of liberal humanism. So I don't mean that in the atheistic sense. I mean the liberal humanity and tolerance, which I know is a big theme that you're interested in. But the stress on, for example, the rights of people to express their own sexual orientation and to be at one with their own basic biological nature, which may be different to how they're seen by other people.

How do you... How does your theory of we accommodate this flowering idea of so many different I's and the need for us to... 'Cause the problem with we is it can lead to an in-group being very cross with another group and people being excluded from the we because they're different. How do you cope with the rise of that sense of difference and the value put on it?

- Well, do you remember, Daniel? Just one of the last things I think David Cameron did was to legalise same-sex marriages. Am I right?

- [Daniel] Yes.

- And I think I was Chief Rabbi at the time. And the Catholics were all expecting me to oppose it. And I didn't oppose it. And they said, "Why not? Do you actually believe in same-sex marriages?" Now I said, "Why not? Because I do not believe in imposing my views on others by force." A liberal democratic society does not impose the views of some on all by force. And that's where I make this clear distinction between the state on the one hand and morality on the other. Individuals will have their own take on what constitutes a loving partnership. And I have my take and others will have other takes, but I do not believe that that is a matter for legislation. I believe it's a matter for moral conviction.

And I take the same view about Israel. Israel should not use the force of Knesset to impose religious standards on a largely secular population. I don't believe in that. In fact, I don't think the rabbis of the Talmud believed in that because they said that, "When God came to give the terror to Israel, he lifted up Mount Sinai, suspended it over their heads, and said, 'You have a completely free choice. Do you accept the terror or not? If you accept the terror, fine. If not, I'm going to let go of the mountain and it's going to drop on you.'" This is the Talmud. It's a famous passage in the Talmud.

The Talmud says, "But that constitutes a decisive objection to the terror." In other words, you can't impose on a population a law against its will. Or as the American Declaration puts it, that "governments acquire their authority by the consent of the government." We believe, as religious Jews, actually, I believe that consent of the governed is absolutely essential to the Jewish concept of freedom. That make sense to you?

- It absolutely makes sense, yes. Can I... Another modern trend, you mentioned it a little bit earlier, and I know from listening to your brilliant radio programmes on morality that it's

something that you're interested in a lot, and that is social media. So for some people, social media is a bit of a terror, right? It is people gathering together in groups, excluding everyone who disagrees with them in a way that polarises politics and polarises debate, means that people are just getting hold of fake news that happens to satisfy their own political predilection. And for others, social media is a profoundly welcome development.

It means that we are able to link up with old friends that we otherwise would lose contact with. We can learn things from people that we otherwise wouldn't ever encounter. We have peer-to-peer rather than hierarchical communication. What is your view of social media, beneficial development or pest?

- I compare people's response to social media to Plato's response to books. He was completely against books in his dialogue called the "Phaedrus" because he thought, once people have books, they'll stop coming to teachers, and that essential dialogue between teacher and disciple will disappear because books will... Oh, well, I think we've had books for 24 centuries or so, and I think, I don't think we've got rid of teachers, except the virus may have done this. So Plato really exaggerated the danger. I think people do exaggerate the danger.

Almost all the new social media we have used, I have used, as a means of communicating knowledge or establishing conversations across the world, and I found them extraordinary. For instance, I've done all sorts of things, Daniel, like writing books, and doing television programmes, and this, that, and the other. But last year, on the run-up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and so on, we took for about 60 days, we put out, one a day, a message on WhatsApp to about 20,000 people. That had more impact, I think, than almost anything I've ever done. And I didn't know why. And people said, "Because WhatsApp is so intimate, and so personal, and so direct." So I think each one of these media, whether it's Facebook Live or it's YouTube or what have you, each one of these media is fine.

I think the most dangerous, if I may say so, politically, is Twitter. I'm not a believer that you can govern by tweet. I may be old-fashioned on that, but I don't think it can be done. I think it gets rid of nuance, complexity. It lacks gravitas. The only thing I'm bothered about, Daniel, with social media is that the research done by Jean Twenge of the University of California, San Diego, in her book "iGen," is that for teenagers, if they spend more than two hours a day on social media, they become progressively more depressed. And we've seen quite a rise in depression and suicide attempts and actual suicides since 2013.

- Why do you think that is?

- I think it's people obsessing with FOMO, fear of missing out. What's my appearance look like? Am I as attractive as the other profiles on Facebook? Do people like me?

- So the challenge there is, is that people trying to fit into the we at the expense of the I?

- I think it's a slightly different distinction that I made in the book between inner-directed and other-directed. If your entire self-esteem is based on what other people think of you, that will not be good news for your psychological, for your psychological resilience. And especially if we're going through deeply changing times, as we are, we know from historical evidence that is the inner-directed characters, the people who have their own Google Maps of the soul, who are able to negotiate much better.

- Yes. Let me broaden that into these are small P political, run that one more time into these are small P political questions. Before sort of asking a bit more about some specific individuals or cases, what about the issue of nationalism as that rises? Is that a rise of the social bonds within countries where people are united in a particular endeavour? Or is it a dangerous populist explosion that threatens minorities?

- The most important distinction, and it's a shame more people don't read this, is the one made by George Orwell in 1943 between patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism means feeling proud to belong to this nation without for one moment suggesting that other people aren't proud of their nation. It's not in any way a negation of anyone else. I'm British and I'm proud of it, but I respect people who are French and are proud of that, et cetera, et cetera.

And that's patriotism and Orwell loved patriotism. Nationalism is almost always the product of fear. And it becomes almost always a dangerous phenomenon. You are threatened by the enemy without or the enemy within. One way or another, it becomes, it can become xenophobia. It can become blaming China for everything or what have you. Or it can become turned inward, fear of Hispanics or Blacks or whoever it is. So nationalism is almost always dangerous and should be fought against. But patriotism, being proud to be part of this country with its history, that's okay. And I really think George Orwell knew what he was talking about here.

- So let me just talk to, go to some specific examples of I suppose nationalist leaders, and one of those is Donald Trump. How do you, through the lens of your book, how do you see... We've traditionally been very reliant on our relationship with the United States. You've made your comments about its individuality, its individualism, but he's something altogether different. How do you view him from a moral point of view, from morality point of view, as a political leader?

- There's a pastor of an American megachurch. Have you ever been... You know what a megachurch is, Daniel.

- Oh, yes, yes.

- A megachurch, this particular one has 40,000 members, and before the lockdown had 25,000 people on an average Sunday. His name is Rick Warren.

- Yeah.

- And he wrote a book called "The Purpose Driven Life," which has sold 30 million copies. The opening sentence is one of the finest opening sentences I've ever read. It is, "It's not about you."

- Yeah.

- That's what I'd like to say to the president of the United States.

- That's a very succinct response. As Jews, of course, we've got a particular interest and a responsibility, I suppose, a shared responsibility, for what happens in the Middle East and Israel's leadership. And how do you measure up developments in Israel against the yardstick of your book?

- So what are you thinking of, Daniel? Are you talking about the letter you signed?

- [Daniel] Sorry?

- Are you talking about the letter you signed recently?

- Well, that was one thing. I was trying to make it more open so as not to force you into more political statements than you wish, but yes, certainly. And so for those of you who are unaware about that, I was one of the signatories of a letter on, and I believe that annexation is both a huge strategic error and also a moral error. And did a rare thing for me, put my name around an open letter, and another rare thing for me, which is joined in criticism of Israeli policy, which I normally avoid doing. It has enough critics.

But I thought this was important enough to do. So that was part of what I was driving at. But I'm... But of course, that was only part of a development, which you comment before about the problems of the country constantly trying to shore up its own security and the moral problems that that provided. So I wanted to give you space for your own answer rather than force you to own the answer about annexation.

- There is brilliantly good news about Israel and there is challenging news about Israel. The brilliantly good news about Israel is Israel is a we society. People do care for their neighbours in Israel. They care. And it's one of the safest places in the world to bring up children 'cause your neighbours will all be looking out for them. And really, it's a most extraordinary place.

And so Israel has a very strong sense of collective responsibility. And one of the builders of that, of course, is service in Tzahal. I mean, actually serving in the Israeli armed forces, which creates networks of friends who are so strongly there for one another, and those friendships last for a lifetime. Did you ever read a book, recent book, by a war journalist, American, called Sebastian Junger?

- No, I haven't.

- Did you come across it? He wrote a book called "Tribe."

- [Daniel] No, I haven't had the chance to read that.

- A very interesting book, short book. It's about the phenomenon that American soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder are not healing. And this is a new phenomenon. And he asks, "Why is it?" And he says, "Because during the Second World War, for instance, American servicemen and women were clearly fighting a war that everyone knew they were fighting on their behalf." It was very strong sense of national identity. So when people came back from the war, and some of them suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, they were kind of healed by being valued by the community as a whole.

He says, "Nowadays, Americans don't feel terribly nationally engaged with Iraq, with Afghanistan, with anything else. And they're so individualistic as society that when soldiers come back, they're not supported by their local community and they are not healing." And in this book, he says... I think that he's... I don't think he's Jewish, by the way. He says, "I think there's only one country in the world where soldiers get healed from post-traumatic stress disorder by being embraced by the community, and that is Israel." He actually says this. So I think Israel is a we society in a way that Britain and America may not have been since the 1950s.

And that's largely because of serving in Tzahal and largely because of the sense of shared danger that they all have. The downside of that is that Israel is fragmented into several publics. The ultra-Orthodox, the Religious Zionists, the traditional, the secular, and the Palestinian Israelis. And President Reuven Rivlin has been speaking about this for several years now, saying Israel is a country of four or five different minorities, none of whom shares a narrative with any of the others. So that's the downside.

- Just to finish off before we open to questions with one last thing. You've got a very compelling narrative about the country's problems and a vision of what it is, what it would be to heal, to use your own words, the country. But it's easy, I suppose, for that to become, for a politician to think, well, where do I begin with that?

So as a little guide to politicians, if you were setting out, embarking, tomorrow on a long trek to get Britain to become closer to the we society that you like, where would you start that journey, with what sort of acts?

- Let's list some of them. Number one, I would create, not with this name, but with this idea, a national day. And I would do this by taking Remembrance Sunday, which is when we remember the wars, First and Second World Wars, and we thank our armed forces, and we remember those who died, and I would take that day and divide it into two and make the morning about war and the past and the afternoon about peace in the future.

And I would find a way of the older generations handing on the baton to young generations. And I would use that occasion to celebrate what is best about British identity, using as a possible model, I mean, it's only a bad model, Danny Boyle's opening ceremony at the 2012 Olympics.

- [Daniel] Oh.

- Which was a wonderful celebration of Britain. But the best example, actually, is in America. Have you seen Lin-Manuel Miranda's, "Hamilton"?

- Of course, twice.

- That's how you tell the national story. And you do it in an inclusive way and you have the Black Americans and the Hispanics playing the key roles. And that is when you say a national thank you to all the Asian, the 40, what is it? 44% of national health workers who are from ethnic minorities. It's a way you make everyone feel included. That's number one.

Number two, you go with Brendan Cox, the husband of the murdered MP, Jo Cox, who has put together a group of people, this is before this pandemic started, to reunite Britain after the divisions opened up by Brexit. And for instance, one of the people who has agreed to be part of this is JK Rowling, who is an iconic figure. And we need to get more iconic figures. I'd vote in David Attenborough, not least 'cause I'm younger than he is, you know?

There are not many people like that, et cetera, et cetera. You'll find ways of key iconic figures celebrating our togetherness with special emphasis on recognising those people who feel unrecognised. Thirdly, I suggest in the book that we take a look at Rajan, what is it, Raghuram, who was the previous chief economist of the World Bank, who has written a book called "The Third Pillar," which is arguing for an economics built on strengthening communities.

You join that with a member of our community, Danny, I'm sure you know him, Sir Ronald Cohen, Britain's first venture capitalist, who is just persuading the G7 to adopt something called impact economics in which firms will be evaluated not just on their profits, but on their social impact. There are new ways of doing economics. I say in the book that it was the head of the world's largest hedge fund, I think... Is that right? Bridgewater Capital, Ray Dalio?

- [Daniel] Mm-hmm.

- Who last year, Ray Dalio, of all people, worth $18 billion himself, who said that the income inequality in the United States is a national emergency. So I'm reluctant to speak because I'm a rabbi. I went to Cambridge to study economics, but I don't declare myself an expert economist. But I think you can strengthen society. I think you can strengthen the equity in economics. I think there are all sorts of things that could be done. But you know what this needs, Danny, this needs not politicians, it needs statesmen and stateswomen.

- Thank you. Carly, you said that at some point I needed to surrender to you the opportunity for questions from participants, and so I think the moment's come.

- Thank you, Daniel.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Thank you. Well, I think I got the best job of the day as I get to question both of you. So Rabbi Sacks, if I may, we'll start off with a question for you. And this is actually something that we've discussed a lot in the past, which is the role of leadership. And looking at this very difficult time that we're in around the world, both economically, politically, and in terms of experiencing something in living memory none of us have before, what would your advice be for world leaders to, what signal should they be sending?

A: I think we've had a most outstanding tutorial in leadership from the 39-year-old young lady who is prime minister of New Zealand, Jacinda, what's her name?

- I've forgotten her surname. Ardern.

- Ardern. Ardern, yes. And she absolutely fabulous show of leadership. Compassionate, empathetic, engaged, but nonetheless a very, very scientifically well-informed, exceptionally honest. I mean, they've had several weeks now with no new cases and certainly no new deaths. And yet her announcement, which announced the end of lockdown, she actually said, "There will be new cases and this will not be because we have failed. It is because of the nature of this particular virus."

I think we've had an absolute object lesson from this particular leader. What leadership requires is this. Number one, empathy. When people are suffering, you have to show that, somehow or other, you feel their pain. I know it's a cliche, but it's absolutely necessary. If you fail to show that, you will fail to lead. Number two, you have to be able to take people through their pain and out on the other side. In other words, you need to give them hope.

And number three, you need total and absolute honesty. If you've got it wrong, you have to say so. It doesn't mean that you are diminished in your eyes or in theirs. So those are the things that I think we need. Empathy, vision, honesty.

Q: Thank you. So Danny, a question for you. In terms of the role of the media in this COVID crisis, particularly in the US, there's been a lot of fairly angry responses from the population to what they feel is perhaps the media driving a lot of the narrative. Could you comment from your journalistic point of view about the role of the media during this?

A: Yeah, I'll give you both the kind of defensive and also the nondefensive answers. The

defensive answers is you proceed in journalism by asking questions and by attempting, as opposed to disprove hypotheses, to find out things that maybe governments don't want to find, to point to find the holes in the narrative. And at moment when countries are putting a huge amount of effort into their collective lockdowns, for example, it can be very annoying to have that. So I understand why people find what they regard as a sort of constant negativity in questioning. But that is I think to some extent the role of the media.

Where I'm less sympathetic to my, more critical of my own colleagues is that I think quite a lot of journalistic coverage is very tactical and quite short-term. There's a very interesting issue about the government admitting its mistakes, which Lord Sacks has just referred to. One of the problems is we don't yet know what the mistakes were. Because we're at a very early stage in the COVID-19 crisis even now, even after we've passed an early peak, and because there's so much we don't know about the development of the virus, and because we also don't know when the stop date is because we don't know when we're going to develop a vaccine, we can't know which things that we did were the problem, as Britain clearly has a problem because it's had a larger number of deaths than elsewhere.

And journalists often think immediately and tactically. They want an answer that day. And that's because we have to put it in tomorrow's newspapers. And I think occasionally the coverage has been insufficiently appreciative of the length of time this is going to take and it's been too focused on the here and now. But there's a huge amount we simply wouldn't know if journalists weren't doing their job. And I think a lot of people have done a pretty good job at trying to explain quite complicated issues to our readers and to people who are watching. And so you're never going to please everybody, but I think it's not been bad.

Q: Thank you. Rabbi Sacks, so those of us in the US haven't had a chance yet to read your new book 'cause it's not due out, I think if memory serves, until the 1st of September. But I wondered if you could talk a little bit about the role of artificial intelligence. And as it increases in society, how does this affect your hopes for this morality and more of the we and less of the I?

A: Actually, I don't discuss artificial intelligence in the book. I wish I had. But I discussed that in my radio programmes with Nick Bostrom, who wrote the book and coined the word, "Superintelligence," which is one stage beyond artificial intelligence. And artificial intelligence, I spoke to, had a lovely conversation with Mustafa Suleyman, who is the co-founder of DeepMind, which is the world's leading artificial intelligence company acquired some years ago by Google. I found Mustafa Suleyman... I mean, Nick Bostrom on "Superintelligence" is exactly the story of the golem. You know the Maharal of Prague and the golem?

The guy who invents this artificial being, but eventually, it runs amok. Or as one American Jewish mother said, "Now I've become a mother, I can relate to God much more because now I know what it's like to invent something you can't control." So, so Nick Bostrom's thesis is don't invent something you can't control. So that's superintelligence. Artificial intelligence, which is machines trained to think like us, only faster and than more thoroughly, that, I think, can be a

huge help. Already, for instance, just by scanning a human retina, it can detect instantly any one of 54 retinal diseases or faults. The diagnostics of artificial intelligence are absolutely huge. And in general, if we keep it ethically supervised, then I'm very much in favour of it. Mustafa built in an independent ethics group into DeepMind to put everything they developed under scrutiny. And some of what they scrutinised was terribly important.

There was a town, where is it, up in the north of England that was using artificial intelligence to decide on sentencing policy for criminals. Fed all sorts of information into a computer to work out how likely a particular criminal was to reoffend. Now there are all sorts of ethical problems in using a computer to hand down sentences. And it turned out that this particular algorithm had biases that were very dangerous and prejudicial. So when you have an ethics group that's supervising everything, you can have a lot more confidence in AI.

Otherwise, I would have some fears because we are going to see, as a result of this pandemic, a lot more tracking and tracing of people, a lot more surveillance of people. Already, the big companies, like Amazon and Google, know more about us than we know about ourselves. So I think AI is a great blessing so long as there are overriding ethical checks.

Q: So this is a question for both of you. And Danny, perhaps you could start. So you both took strong stances over the anti-Semitism in the Labour Party over the last few years, and particularly its previous leadership. Have you engaged with Keir Starmer? And do you feel the party is turning a corner and that it can return to its actually mainly Jewish roots?

A: I absolutely think it is turning a corner. So I've always regarded what happened to the Labour Party as, the anti-Semitism of the Labour Party as arising from Jeremy Corbyn's quite peculiar brand of politics, what I always used to call a sort of Leninist anti-imperialism, which was actually alien to the party's social democratic traditions. It was a small part of its coalition. And I think the party insufficiently understood, and lots of people who voted for him insufficiently understood, how outside the mainstream of Labour Party thinking Jeremy Corbyn actually was.

And if they had underappreciated it, more, if they'd appreciated it more, he wouldn't have been elected. And most people thought that they were electing somebody who was merely a kind of more compassionate, more left-wing, kind of more moral person. But he also came with a huge amount of ideological baggage, which I tried really hard to write about a lot of the time. So I always felt when Jeremy Corbyn left the leadership, even if he were succeeded by say Rebecca Long-Bailey, he would never be succeeded by somebody who subscribed quite to that idea. And so therefore, it would always be an improvement. But it's better than that, Carly.

So it's the idea... Jeremy Corbyn has been replaced by somebody who clearly has the determination to do something about it. A problem like this doesn't go away overnight. They've got a large strand of the party that has now been schooled by Corbyn, has been brought up in that, has begun to think that the dialogue is acceptable. They rejected as a faction, as you can see from their publication. But I think it would be dangerous and ungenerous of the Jewish

community not to recognise the massive effort that Keir Starmer was already putting into this problem, the leadership that he's showing. And to say, well, from a Jewish point of view, this is a reassuring development.

But also, speaking as a Conservative, anything that makes the Labour Party more electable has often, you sort of think, oh, dear, that's a problem, right? But now, I don't look at it the same way. I think anything that makes the Labour Party more electable at least also makes it less dangerous if it governs. And I could do without having another general election, like the last one, where even though I did think the Conservatives would win, I worried about the consequences if they did not. And I think Keir Starmer will fundamentally change that calculation.

Q: Rabbi Sacks?

A: Agree absolutely with Daniel. Keir Starmer has proved himself to be committed to ridding the party of anti-Semitism and major practitioners of it, and I salute that. I think the whole community feels very, very reassured. At the same time, the truth is that we had a terrible scare. I think the whole community felt a terrible scare. And I think we just use that. We don't suppress it, just use it to remain constantly vigilant. You never know when it's going to recur and I think we remain vigilant. But the fact is that the Labour Party today is not what it was under Jeremy Corbyn.

Q: So I'd like to turn Rabbi Sacks now to a question about the last 10 days in America, particularly around the marches in support of Black Lives Matter. We've had several questions today around that, so I'm going to group them together a little bit. The first one is on the nature of the organisation, Black Lives Matter. So for many in the Jewish community or those who support Israel, Black Lives Matter is a difficult organisation to engage with because of some of its leadership and comments they've made about Israel and the Jewish community.

So how would you advise people to support this cause, being sensitive to that, particularly those on campus who already have a difficult time around their support of Israel? And then the second theme that's come up is if people do go to the streets to protest what has become a critical cause whilst the country is still formally under lockdown, and where does that fit into your question over morality and the we and the I, given that both causes, you could argue, should be people taking a step towards we?

A: To answer the second first, it's perfectly possible to mount a protest and maintain social distancing. It's really not difficult. It's been done in several countries, several countries that marched in support of Black Americans and in protest against Floyd's death. There was social distancing. The idea that it's either one or the other is an absurdity. Secondly, it's very, very important for us, all of us, and especially public leadership, to make a distinction between protest on the one hand, which is totally legitimate, and on the other hand, rioting, violence, and vandalism.

The end result of some of the riots, especially in Los Angeles, but also in Chicago, at some in

Atlanta and so on, was destruction, the looting and trashing of businesses, many of which were owned by ethnic minorities. People who'd come to America spent a whole life trying to build up a business for them and their families already hit by the lockdown and now doubly hit by the rioting and the looting. I thought that was absolutely terrible. Protest is one thing. The maintenance of law and order nonetheless is absolutely essential, because without that, you have mob rule. And everyone should be afraid of mob rule.

But Jews, remembering our history, should know exactly what's involved in mob rule. That's what happened in Russia in the 17th century, in the 19th century, in the early 20th century. And the result was pogroms, God forbid. I have to tell you, Carly, that I was, Elaine and I were receiving reports from Jews here and there, all over America. People were really scared, because for the first time, riots moved into the wealthier neighbourhoods and they came very, very close to centres of Jewish population again.

It was Los Angeles that was the worst hit. And they were terrified. Now one thing a government has to do is make sure citizens, law-abiding citizens, are safe. So you have to make clear the difference between protest and riot. Protest, yes, riot, no. And you cannot afford to relax your grip one little bit. Black Lives Matter has adopted, as have a number of minority groups, even feminist groups in America for the last 20 years have been anti-Israel and to the point of anti-Semitic, and some other groups have as well, even gay pride has.

This is really, really bad. I'm sure you know that... Well, look, there's a lovely Jewish man, a young man in his late 80s I think, early 90s, who built an incredible school for African Americans in Harlem in New York to share with them all the stuff that we know about moving out of poverty, creating schools, and people of high achievement. Was brilliantly, brilliantly done. And he came and told me about his work. And he told me that 90% of the supporters of the financial supporters of Martin Luther King on his march to Washington in '63, 90% of them were Jewish. Jews have gone out of their way to try and help Blacks escape from poverty and underachievement.

And so I find that Black Lives Matter turning a little bit anti-Semetic and quite a lot anti-Israel is really worrying. And what I want to say to African Americans is this is not the way to go. It really isn't. Don't set yourself against Jews because Jews know poverty, and suffering, and police brutality. We know this, and we know how to move beyond it, and we know how to help you move beyond it, and we want to help you move beyond it. So don't alienate us by hating and treating as your enemies the people who are really and truly your deepest friends.

- Rabbi Sacks, Lord Finkelstein, thank you both. I could go on as we've got about 40 more questions, but as Joanna, who is really the boss, has told me that we had a hard stop at six o'clock. I won't challenge her wrath, so I'm going to hand back over to Wendy.

- Thank you very much, Rabbi Sacks and Danny for a truly fascinating hour. It has been a real privilege to hear from you both. During this very difficult situation, having wonderful people like

yourselves willing to share their time and expertise has made this lockdown much easier. What an hour. I speak for all of us when I say I feel so privileged to have been a viewer to that riveting exchange. Thank you for taking us on this enriching journey. I agree, now more than ever, the role of morality is the lifeblood of our humanity. And I hope that everyone on this call heeds your words and takes a step towards the we. I have always believed that one and one makes 11, and add another one, and it makes 111. Stay safe, and together, we will get through this. Thank you both once again for the most wonderful presentation. Goodnight.

- Thanks.

- [Daniel] Goodnight.