

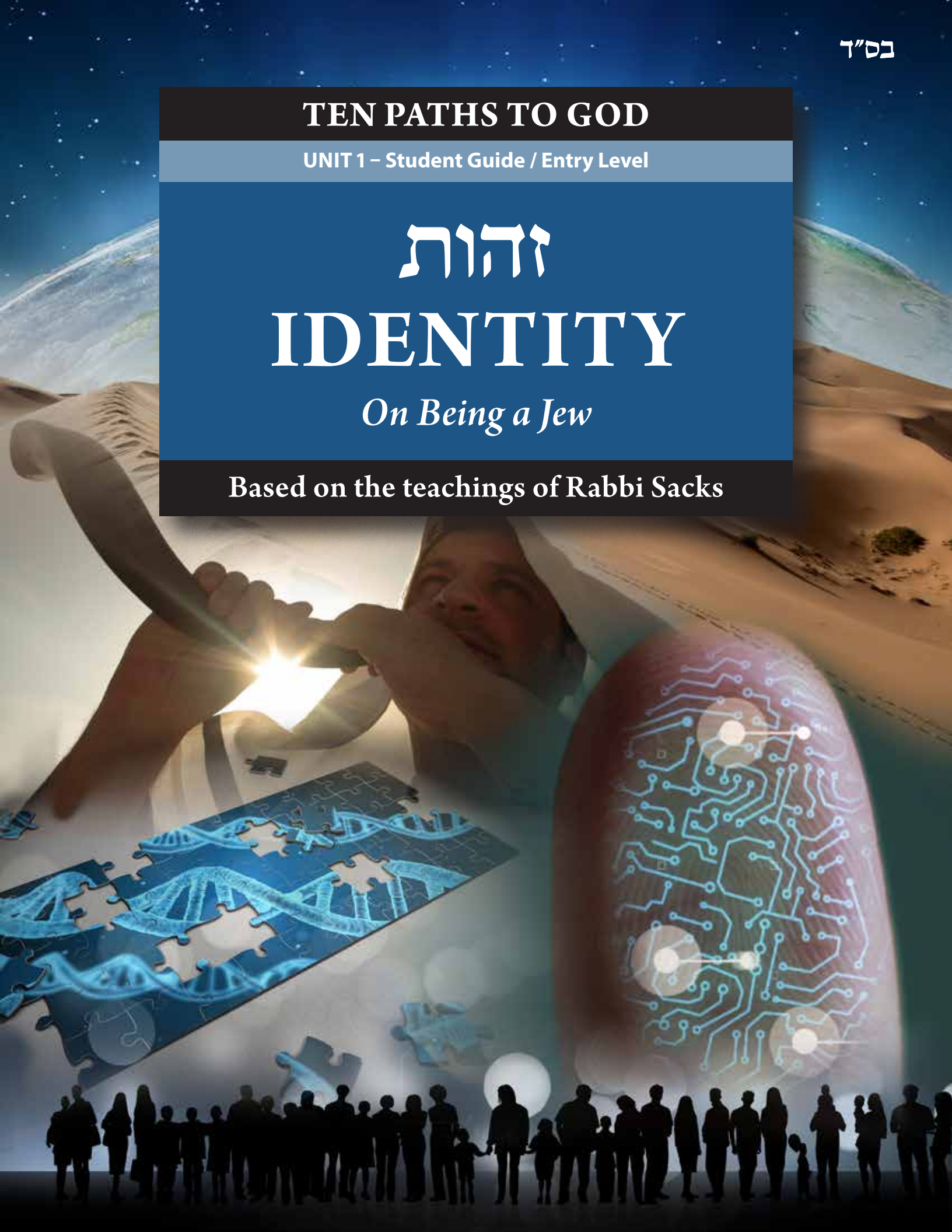
TEN PATHS TO GOD

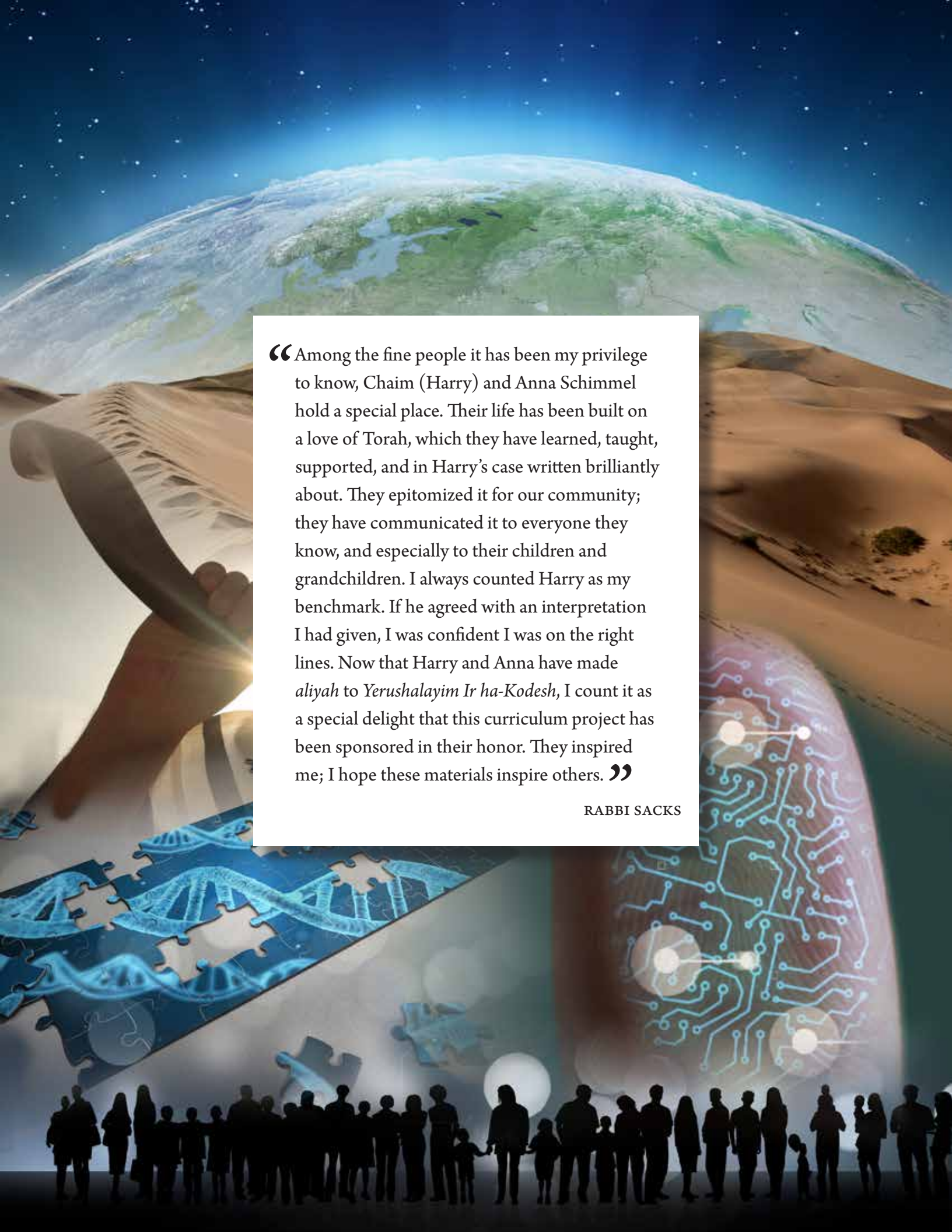
UNIT 1 – Student Guide / Entry Level

זהות IDENTITY

On Being a Jew

Based on the teachings of Rabbi Sacks





“Among the fine people it has been my privilege to know, Chaim (Harry) and Anna Schimmel hold a special place. Their life has been built on a love of Torah, which they have learned, taught, supported, and in Harry’s case written brilliantly about. They epitomized it for our community; they have communicated it to everyone they know, and especially to their children and grandchildren. I always counted Harry as my benchmark. If he agreed with an interpretation I had given, I was confident I was on the right lines. Now that Harry and Anna have made *aliyah* to *Yerushalayim Ir ha-Kodesh*, I count it as a special delight that this curriculum project has been sponsored in their honor. They inspired me; I hope these materials inspire others. ”

RABBI SACKS

Introduction

Watch: The opening video for Unit 1



First Reading: Read through the text from the video. Highlight each word or phrase that you are unsure of, whether it is the meaning of the language or the meaning of the concept.



Uniquely, Jews are born into a faith. It chooses us before we choose it. Physically we come naked into the world, but spiritually we come with a gift: the story of our past, of our parents and theirs, through almost forty centuries from the day Avraham and Sarah first heard the call of God and began their journey to a land, a promise, a destiny and a vocation. That story is ours.

It is a strange and moving story. It tells of how a family, then a collection of tribes, then a nation, were summoned to be God's ambassadors on earth. They were charged with building a society unlike any other, based not on wealth and power but on justice and compassion, the dignity of the individual and the sanctity of human life – a society that would honor the world as God's work and the human person as God's image.

That was and is a demanding task, yet Judaism remains a realistic religion. It assumed from the outset that transforming the world would take many generations – hence the importance of handing on our ideals to the next generation. It takes many gifts, many different kinds of talent – hence the importance of Jews as a people. None of us has all the gifts but each of us has some. We all count; we each have a unique contribution to make. We come before God as a people, each giving something and each lifted by the contributions of others.

And yes, at times we fail or fall short – hence the importance of *teshuvah*, repentance, apology, forgiveness, re-dedication. Judaism is bigger than any of us, yet it is made by all of us. And though Jews were and are a tiny people, today a mere fifth of a per cent of the population of the world, we have made a contribution to civilization out of all proportion to our numbers.

To be a Jew is to continue the journey our ancestors began, to build a world that honors the image of God in every human being and to be part of a people summoned by God to be His ambassadors down here on earth.

Jonathan Sacks



Analysis in Chavruta: Now in *chavruta* (pairs), take a look again at the text. Discuss and answer the questions on the terms and phrases that are highlighted for you.

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a faith

1. What does the word *faith* mean?
2. What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he says we are born into a faith?
3. Why do you think the word faith is sometimes used to refer to this?



the story of our past

1. When do you think “the story of our past” begins? When does Rabbi Sacks state it begins? When do you think it ends?
2. Do you think it is important to learn about the “story of our past”? Why?
3. Do you learn Jewish history at your school? Do you think Jewish history should be taught by the history department or by the Jewish studies department? Why?

the call of God

1. What do you think Rabbi Sacks means by “the call of God”?
2. What did God “call” on Avraham and Sarah to do or be?
3. Do you think God has called on you to do or be something?

journey to a land

1. Which land?
2. Why do you think God starts Jewish history by asking Avraham to leave his home and travel to an unknown land?
3. How do you think our land is connected to the next few words in the text: “a promise, a destiny and a vocation”?

a promise, a destiny and a vocation

1. What do the words *promise*, *destiny* and *vocation* mean? Are these words related to each other at all?
2. What do you imagine your destiny is?
3. Have you found your vocation yet?

ambassadors on earth

1. What is the job of an ambassador?
2. How can we be God’s ambassadors?
3. Do you think we are doing a good job?

building a society

1. What does the word *society* mean?
2. How do you “build” a society?
3. Where can we as Jews build a society?



justice and compassion, the dignity of the individual and the sanctity of human life

1. What do these words mean?
2. What do they have in common?
3. How do you build a society based on these values?

God's work

1. What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he says that the world is "God's work"?
2. Where do you see this to be true in the world?
3. Do you think it can be proven?

God's image

1. If God does not have a physical form, then how can He have an "image"?
2. What does it mean to be created in the "image of God"? Think about all the other creations that are not made in God's image – how are we as humans different? Are these differences what it means to be created in the image of God?
3. Which people are created in God's image?

handing on our ideals to the next generation

1. How do we "hand on our ideals to the next generation"?
2. What ideals have your parents handed on to you?
3. How have they handed them on to you?

we have made a contribution to civilization out of all proportion to our numbers

1. What contributions have the Jewish people made to civilization?
2. Can you give any examples of Jews that have made a big impact on the world?
3. Why do you think we have made these contributions despite our small number?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class and share your answers. Listen carefully to the perspectives of your classmates. Did anyone take a different approach to the text from you? Does their approach resonate with you?

The Core Concepts



Exploration of the Core Concepts: Together with your *chavruta* join another pair to form a small *chabura* (study group). Look at the supplementary sources provided below for each of the core concepts highlighted in the text. Your teacher will tell you which core concept to look at first. Make sure you understand it fully, and write down any questions you have.

Explain how the supplementary sources help you understand the core concept they are connected to. Use the questions to guide your discussion and analysis.

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A PEOPLE OF HISTORY



לֵב כִּי שְׁאַל-נָא לַיָּמִים רָאשֵׁינִים אֲשֶׁר-הָיוּ לְפָנֶיךָ לְמִן-הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים וְאָדָם עַל-הָאָרֶץ
לֵב וְלִמְקַצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד-קֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם הִנֵּהיָה כְּדָבָר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה אוֹ הַנִּשְׁמָע כְּמִהוּ: הַשְׁמַע עִם
לֵב קוֹל אֱלֹהִים מְדַבֵּר מִתּוֹךְ-הָאֵשׁ כְּאֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַעְתָּ אֹתָהּ וַיְחִי: אוֹ הַנִּסָּה אֱלֹהִים לָבוֹא לְקַחַת לּוֹ
גוֹי מִקֶּרֶב גּוֹי בְּמִסֹּת בְּאֹתוֹת וּבְמוֹפְתִים וּבְמִלְחָמָה וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזִרְעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְמוֹרָאִים גְּדֹלִים
כָּל אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לָכֶם ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֶיךָ:

Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

Devarim 4:32–34

1. "Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of?" To what is this referring exactly?
2. Do you think it could also be referring to Jewish history in general? In your opinion, is Jewish history unique? Is it miraculous?
3. Can Jewish history be a source of faith? Is it a source of faith for you? Why?



a promise

THE CALL

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָךְ: וְאָנֹכִי
לְגֹי גָדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְהָ שְׁמֹךְ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה: וְאֶבְרַכְהָ מִבְּרַכְיֶיךָ וּמִקֻּלְלֶיךָ אֲדָר וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְּךָ כָּל
מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה:

The Lord said to Avram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all families on earth will be blessed through you.'

Bereishit 12:1–3

1. God made two covenants with Avraham, but this is not one of them. What is the difference between a promise and a covenant?
2. What exactly is Avraham being called on to do?
3. What does it mean to "be a blessing"? Is this a promise, or part of the call?

THE WAY OF THE LORD

וְאֶבְרָהִם הָיָה לְגֹי יָהִיָּה גָדוֹל וְעַצוֹם וְנִבְרַכְוּ בּוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ: כִּי יִדְעֻהֶנּוּ לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יַעֲזִיחַ
אֶת-בָּנָיו וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשִׁמְרוּ דֶּרֶךְ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הָבִיֵּא ה' עַל-אַבְרָהִם
אֵת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר עָלָיו:

Avraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Avraham what He has promised him.

Bereishit 18:18–19

1. What does it mean to be a "great and powerful nation"? Why is that important?
2. What do you think Avraham has been chosen for?
3. Why has Avraham been chosen according to these *pesukim*? Although the translation seems to imply that Avraham was chosen *in order* to instruct his children, the Hebrew text leaves room for the implication that Avraham was chosen because he *naturally* understands the importance of education. Which of these interpretations do you think most accurately describes Avraham, and the Jewish people in general?



DUST AND THE STARS



'I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heaven and the sand on the seashore' (Bereishit 22:17). Rabbi Yehudah bar Ilai explained: This people is compared to dust and to the stars. When it sinks, it sinks to the dust, but when it rises, it rises to the stars.

Talmud Bavli, Megillah 16a

'I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth' (Bereishit 13:16). As the dust of the earth is from one end of the world to the other, so your children will be dispersed from one end of the world to the other. As dust is trodden on by all, so will your children be trodden on by the peoples of the world. As dust outlives all vessels of metal while it endures forever, so all the peoples of the earth will cease to be, while Israel endures forever.

Bereishit Rabbah 41, Lech Lecha

1. According to these sources, is it a blessing or a curse to be compared to the dust of the earth?
2. Dispersed throughout the world; trodden on by other nations; outliving other nations – have these things happened to the Jewish people in their history?
3. Do you have an idea why this may have been part of God's plan?

a destiny and a vocation... to be God's ambassadors on earth

A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS



אֲנִי ה' קְרָאתִיךָ בְּצִדְקָה וְאֶחֱזֶק בְּיָדְךָ וְאֶצְרֶךְ וְאֶתֶּנְךָ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוּר גּוֹיִם: לִפְתּוֹחַ עֵינַיִם עוֹרוֹת
לְהוֹצִיא מִמַּסְגֵּר אֲסִיר מִבֵּית כְּלָא יֹשְׁבֵי חֹשֶׁךְ:

I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

Yeshayahu 42:6–7

1. What do you think it means to be "a light for the nations"?
2. In your opinion, should the following be taken literally? If not, then what could the text mean?
 - a. "to open eyes that are blind"
 - b. "to free captives from prison"
 - c. "to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness"



3. Do you think the Jewish people are “a light for the nations” today? Can you give examples?

LIKE FRAGRANT OIL



‘Your name is like fragrant oil poured out,’ (Shir HaShirim 1:3): As oil brings light to the world, so Israel brings light to the world, as it is said, ‘Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn,’ (Yeshayahu 60:3).

Shir HaShirim Rabbah, 1:3:2

1. Shir HaShirim compares the Jewish people to perfume. This midrash gives one explanation of what that means. What is it?
2. Can you think of another explanation of how the Jewish people can be compared to perfume?
3. Why do you think the midrash focuses on the capacity of oil to bring light? What kind of “light” do the Jewish people bring to the world?

THE JEWISH HEART OF THE WORLD



Israel is to the nations as the heart is to the limbs of the body.

Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, The Kuzari: 11:36

1. What role does the heart play for the rest of the body? In what way do the Jewish people play that role for the rest of the world?
2. What happens to the body when the heart isn’t healthy or malfunctions? What can that teach us about the Jewish people?
3. Do you believe the Jewish people do play that role in the world? Do you think the nations of the world see that also?

THE ENNOBLEMENT OF THE HUMAN RACE



The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, an almost fanatical love of justice, and the desire for personal independence – these are the features of the Jewish tradition which make me thank my stars that I belong to it.

Albert Einstein, As I See It, p. 103

1. Where in Judaism do you think these values are transmitted?
2. Albert Einstein was not a religious Jew. Nevertheless he received these values from Judaism. How do you think that happened?
3. Do you think these values inspired him to become a scientist? How so?



BIGGER THAN OUR NUMBERS



Each of us Jews knows how thoroughly ordinary he is; yet taken together, we seem caught up in things great and inexplicable . . . The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us.

Milton Himmelfarb, *Jews and Gentiles*, p. 141–142

1. We are so very small in terms of the population of the world. Do you think we have made a contribution beyond our small numbers?
2. Can you explain why this is?
3. Can you explain why “big things seem to happen around us and to us”?

LOOKING OUTWARD



We have become altogether too inward-looking, with our horizons largely limited within the ghetto-walls we have erected to separate us from the rest of our people and from the human society beyond . . . Preoccupied with the burning problems of our own survival, we have lost sight with our assignment as a light unto the nations.

Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, *The Timely and the Timeless*, p. 96–97

1. What do you think Rabbi Jakobovits means when he says: “We have become altogether too inward-looking”?
2. Do you agree with him? Can you give examples to prove your point?
3. How does being “outward-looking” allow us to better fulfill “our assignment as a light unto the nations”?



building a society unlike any other

THE COVENANT AT SINAI: A HOLY NATION



אֲתֶם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֲשָׁא אֶתְכֶם עַל־כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרִים וָאֵבָא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי: וְעַתָּה
אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשִׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֻגָּה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ:
וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבַּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Shemot 19:4–6

1. The term *Am Segula* is often non-literally translated as “chosen people”. Here, however, it is translated as “treasured possession”. Are these two terms connected?
2. If we are “treasured” by God does that mean we are His favorite, or could He have other “treasured” people who have a different relationship with Him?
3. What do you think it means to be a “kingdom of priests”? What role did the priestly tribe (the tribe of Levi) have in biblical times? How can the Jewish people serve in that role in today's world?

handing on our ideals to the next generation

LOYALTY TO GOD



Devoid of power, splendor, bereft of the brilliant show of human grandeur, Israel was upheld by its faithfulness toward the All-One... Other states, everywhere, in all the glory of human power and arrogance, disappeared from the face of the earth, while Israel, though devoid of might and splendor, lived on because of its loyalty to God and His Law.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters*, p. 64

1. What do you think Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch means by “power, splendor... grandeur”?
2. How do you think the Jewish people survived despite not having these things?
3. Was this more about God, or us, or a combination?



HOPE IN FAILURE



Despair and resignation were unknown to the man of the covenant who found triumph in defeat, hope in failure, and who could not conceal God's Word that was, to paraphrase Jeremiah, deeply implanted in his bones and burning in his heart like an all-consuming fire.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, p. 112

1. How do you think the Jewish people managed to see "triumph in defeat" and "hope in failure" throughout their history?
2. Who "implanted" this hope in our "bones"?
3. How can we make sure it is "implanted" in the "bones" of future generations too?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class. Present your approach to the core concept allocated to you, making reference to the supplementary sources and the answers you came up with to the questions accompanying them.

As a class, consider the following meta-questions (big picture questions):

1. What has God called on the Jewish people to be or do? What is the national mission of the Jewish people?
2. How can we best fulfill this role?
3. How do you think we are doing in this mission?

The Assignment



Final Thoughts: The following text, by Rabbi Sacks, summarizes the lessons and concepts we have been studying in this unit:

REMAKING THE WORLD



For forty centuries, Jews have held tenaciously to the belief that we have been charged with a sacred mission: to sanctify life by being God's ambassadors to a world that has all too often worshipped the multiple forms of what Nietzsche called 'the will to power.' We were called on to write a different story, that tells of the beauty of holiness and the call of compassion: 'to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world.'

Judaism has placed at the center of its striving some of the most healing of all sacred imperatives: the importance of love and loyalty; marriage and the sacred bonds between husband and wife, parent and child; education and the life of the mind; justice, equity and the rule of law; compassion, charity and human dignity; the bonds of belonging and community; memory, history and imperishable hope. We seek God not just in the remote heavens or the innermost recesses of the soul but in ordinary life, with its pleasures and pains, fears and hopes, conflicts and consolations. Judaism believes not in abandoning earth for the sake of heaven, but in bringing fragments of heaven down to earth in simple deeds and celebrations.

For that is where God is found. Not in wealth, power, fame, success, or any other of the myriad substitutes for life, still less in violence and terror, but in life itself: living, breathing (*neshamah*, the Hebrew word for soul, means 'breathing'), loving, giving, caring, praying, praising, giving thanks, defeating tragedy in the name of hope, and death in the name of life.

Our task is to be true to our faith and a blessing to others: a blessing to others *because* we are true to our faith. To be a Jew is to bring redemption, one day at a time, one act at a time. Every *mitzvah*, every kind word or deed, every act of sharing what we have with others, brings the Divine presence into the world. By recognizing the image of God in other people, we help to remake the world in the image of God.



In this unit we have explored the concept of the Jewish people having a "destiny and vocation" to be "God's ambassadors on earth," and to "build a society like no other" based on the values found in the Torah, and described in this text. While it is perhaps a little early on in your life to think about being a society builder (although why not dream big?!) let's start with your school's community.



Part 1: Work in small groups allocated by your teacher. Your job in this assignment is to create a proposal to improve your school society. Suggest three initiatives that will improve your school's community based on the values that Rabbi Sacks says our wider society should be built on.

1. Make a list of the values found in the paragraph in the text that is italicized. Describe where each of these values is already found in your school.
2. Choose three of the values. Write a short proposal based on each value to create a program that will improve your school's community.



Part 2: For bonus points, prepare a list of questions for Rabbi Sacks on any of the topics we have studied in this unit. Send your questions to your teacher, who will forward a number of insightful questions from the class to Rabbi Sacks. Rabbi Sacks will respond to a selection of the questions he receives for each unit from students around the world. Visit www.RabbiSacks.org/TenPaths to see his responses.



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