

TEN PATHS TO GOD

UNIT 3 – Student Guide / Entry Level

לימוד

STUDY

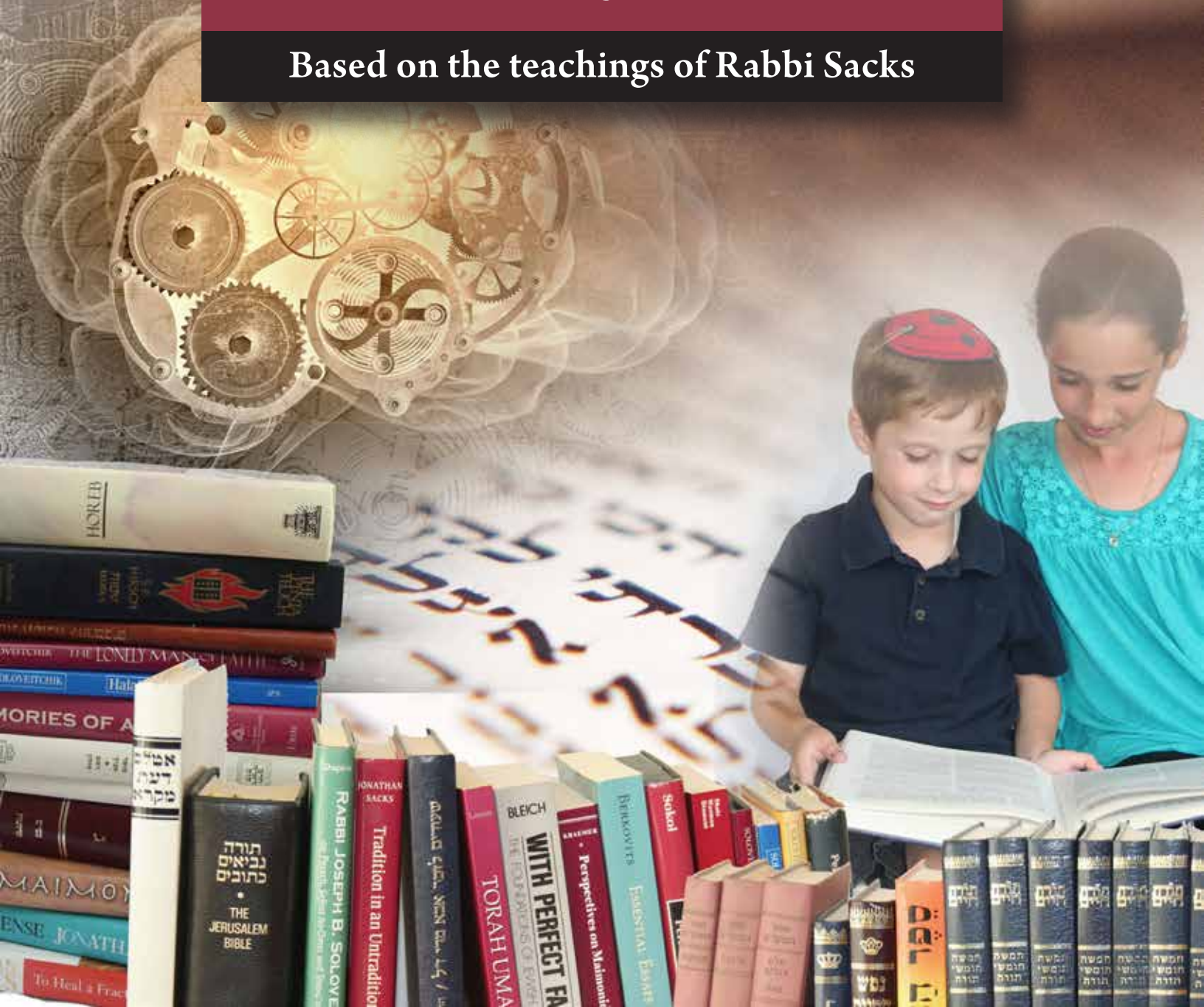
Listening to God

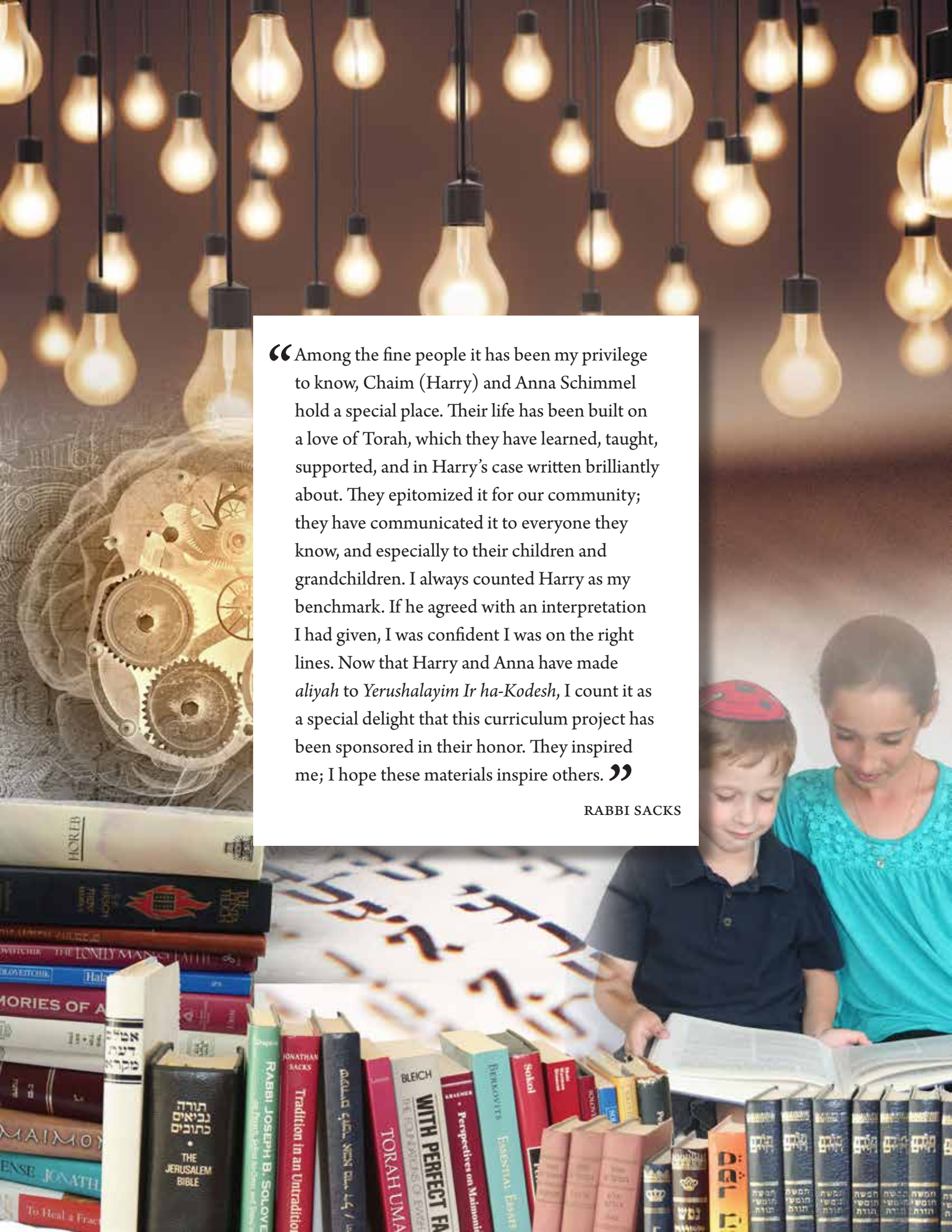
Based on the teachings of Rabbi Sacks

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Listening to God

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“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 3



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.

Jews are the “people of the book.” *Talmud Torah* – studying Torah – is the greatest of all the commands and the secret of Jewish continuity. In the *Shema* we are commanded, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your might.” Then almost immediately it says, “Teach these things repeatedly to your children, speaking of them when you sit at home and when you travel on the way, when you lie down and when you rise.” Judaism is a religion of education.

Study is holier even than prayer, for in prayer we speak to God, but in study we listen to God. We strive to understand what God wants from us. We try to make His will ours. For the holiest thing is God’s word. The Torah – God’s word to our ancestors – is our constitution as a nation, our covenant of liberty, the code by which we decipher the mystery and meaning of life.

The words of the Torah span a thousand years, from Moses to Malachi, the first and last of the prophets. For another thousand years, until the completion of the Babylonian Talmud, Jews added commentaries to the Book, and for yet another thousand years they wrote commentaries to the commentaries. Never has there been a deeper relationship between a people and a book. The ancient Greeks, puzzled by the phenomenon of an entire people dedicated to learning, called Jews “a nation of philosophers.” Certainly we are called on to be a nation of students and teachers. In Judaism we not only learn to live; we live to learn. In study, we make Torah real in the mind so that we can make it actual in the world.

Jonathan Sacks



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

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“people of the book”

1. Have you heard this description of the Jewish people before? What do you think it means?
2. Which book? Could it be more than one book, or just books in general?
3. How do you think the Jewish people earned this description? Do you think it applies just as much to our generation as it does to previous generations?

greatest of all the commands

1. Why do you think Rabbi Sacks describes the *mitzvah* of learning Torah as the “greatest of all the commands”?
2. What exactly is the *mitzvah* of learning Torah? How can we fulfill it?
3. Do you agree that it is the most important of all the *mitzvot*?



secret of Jewish continuity

1. What does “Jewish continuity” mean?
2. Why do we need to be concerned about it?
3. Why do you think Rabbi Sacks describes the *mitzvah* of learning Torah as the “secret of Jewish continuity”?

in study we listen to God

1. Unit 2 of this curriculum, which is about Prayer, is entitled “Talking to God,” and this unit, which is about learning Torah, is entitled “Listening to God.” How is learning Torah listening to God?
2. Which do you think is more important, talking to God or listening to God?
3. Considering the above, do you think studying Torah could be likened to receiving prophecy?

constitution as a nation

1. What is a constitution? (For example, consider the constitution of the United States of America.)
2. How is the Torah our constitution?
3. If you had to sum up the most important ideas contained in the Torah as the constitution of the Jewish people, what would they be?

covenant of liberty

1. What is a covenant (in Hebrew a *brit*/ברית)?
2. What does liberty mean?
3. How does the Torah guarantee liberty?

code by which we decipher the mystery and meaning of life

1. What is the meaning of life according to the Torah?
2. Why is life a mystery?
3. Does life have to have meaning? What would your life be like without meaning?



“a nation of philosophers”

1. What is a philosopher?
2. Why do you think the ancient Greeks thought the Jewish people were a “nation of philosophers”?
3. Is this the same as being a “people of the book”? Can you be one without the other? Does one lead to the other?

nation of students and teachers

1. What is more important, to be a student or to be a teacher?
2. Can you be one without the other?
3. Are you a student, or a teacher, or both? Will this always be the case?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class and share your answers to the questions. 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 Torah is...



Analysis: Take another look at the text and highlight every time Rabbi Sacks describes the Torah, or the *mitzvah* of learning Torah. Make a list of all the descriptions of Torah that you find as you learn the sources in this section.

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Analysis in Chavruta: Now in *chavruta*, explore the following texts, using the questions below to guide you. Each time you come across another description of the Torah, add it to your list.

HOW I LOVE YOUR LAW



צו מה־אֶהְבֶּתִי תוֹרַתְךָ כָּל־הַיּוֹם הִיא שִׁיחָתִי:

Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.

קד מה־נִמְלֵצוּ לַחֲכִי אִמְרֹתֶיךָ מִדְּבַשׁ לִפִּי:

How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

קה גִּדְלֹגְלִי דְבַרְךָ וְאוֹר לְנִתְיָבְתִּי:

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.

קיא נַחֲלָתִי עֲדוּתֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם כִּי־שִׂשְׁוֹן לִבִּי הִמָּוָה:

Your statutes are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.

קל פֶּתַח־דְּבָרֶיךָ יֵאִיר מִבֵּין פְּתִיּוֹם:

The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.

קמד צֶדֶק עֲדוּתֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם הִבִּינֵנִי וְאַחִיָּה:

Your statutes are forever right;
give me understanding that I may live.

Tehillim 119:97, 103, 105, 111, 130, 144

1. Why do you think the author of this psalm compares the Torah to honey? Is your experience of learning Torah sweet? If not, do you think it might be one day?
2. What is a heritage? Why would God's "statutes" (laws) bring you joy?
3. How does the Torah bring light into the world?

FIRE



Rav Papa [said] in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: The Torah that God gave Moshe, was given to him as a white fire engraved with black fire.

Talmud Yerushalmi, Shekalim 6:1

1. How is the Torah like fire?
2. What do you think the "black fire" represents? What does the "white fire" represent?
3. The text describes the gaps between the letters and words of the Torah given to Moshe as being of fire. Can gaps between letters and words also have meaning?



AIR (OXYGEN)

Pappos ben Yehuda came and found Rabbi Akiva, who was convening assemblies in public and engaging in Torah study. Pappos said to him: Akiva, are you not afraid of the empire? Rabbi Akiva answered him: I will relate a parable. To what can this be compared? It is like a fox walking along a riverbank when he sees fish gathering and fleeing from place to place.

The fox said to them: From what are you fleeing?

They said to him: We are fleeing from the nets that people cast upon us.

He said to them: Do you wish to come up onto dry land, and we will reside together just as my ancestors resided with your ancestors?

The fish said to him: You are the one of whom they say, he is the cleverest of animals? You are not clever; you are a fool. If we are afraid in the water, our natural habitat which gives us life, then in a habitat that causes our death, all the more so.

The moral is: So too, we Jews, now that we sit and engage in Torah study, about which it is written: "For that is your life, and the length of your days" (Devarim 30:20). We fear the empire to this extent; if we proceed to sit idle from its study, as its abandonment is the habitat that causes our death, all the more so will we fear the empire.

Talmud Bavli, Berachot 61b

1. Why can't fish live without water? What would life be like without it for the fish?
2. What does the water represent for the fish in the story? What is the message for the Jewish people?
3. What would life be like for the Jewish people without the Torah?



WATER



It is taught in a *baraita* with regard to the verse: “And Moshe led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water” (Shemot 15:22). Those who interpret verses metaphorically said that water here is referring to nothing other than Torah, as it is stated metaphorically, concerning those who desire wisdom: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come for water” (Yeshayahu 55:1). The *baraita* continues: “The verse means that since the Jews traveled for three days without hearing any Torah they became weary, and therefore the prophets among them arose and instituted for them that they should read from the Torah each Shabbat, and pause on Sunday, and read again on Monday, and pause on Tuesday and Wednesday, and read again on Thursday, and pause on Shabbat eve, so they would not tarry three days without hearing the Torah.”

Talmud Bavli, Bava Kamma 82a

1. What does water represent to a human being?
2. How is the Torah therefore like water?
3. Can you think of any other ways the Torah is like water?



Share your analysis: Join another *chavruta* to form a *chabura*. Share the lists you made of descriptions of the Torah. Are they the same? Which of all the descriptions of Torah most resonated with you? Have you heard the Torah described in any other way? Can you think of another way to describe the Torah?

The People of the Book



Analysis in Chavruta: Together with your *chavruta*, reread Rabbi Sacks' opening words. This time, using a different color, highlight every time Rabbi Sacks describes the Jewish people or Judaism and how it has been influenced by the *mitzvah* of studying Torah.

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Analysis in Chavruta: Now let's try to understand how the Jewish people have earned this reputation. We will do this through analyzing several secondary texts that explore the role of education and Torah learning in Jewish culture and Judaism. By the end of this section you should have a clearer idea of what has led to the Jewish people becoming the "People of the Book." Prepare a brief presentation to be shared with the rest of your class – your thesis on what has led to this phenomenon. Include examples from your own life and your community.

THE THREE CROWNS



With three crowns was Israel crowned – with the crown of the Torah, the crown of the priesthood and the crown of sovereignty. The crown of the priesthood was bestowed on Aaron... The crown of sovereignty was conferred on David... But the crown of the Torah is for all Israel, as it is said, "Moshe commanded us a law, an inheritance of the congregation of Yaakov" (Devarim 33:4). Whoever desires it can win it. Do not suppose that the other two crowns are greater than the crown of the Torah for it is said, "By me, kings reign and princes decree justice. By me, princes rule" (Mishlei 8:15–16). Hence you can infer that the crown of the Torah is greater than the other two crowns.

Rambam, Laws of Torah Study, 3:1

1. Why do you think priesthood, kingship, and Torah scholarship are described as "crowns"?
2. Who has been gifted with each crown? What do these groups represent?
3. Why do you think it is important that only a small group function as the spiritual leadership (priests), and political leadership (the King), but that everyone should have the power of knowledge (Torah learning)?



THE WORLD'S FIRST UNIVERSAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

H.G. Wells noted in his Outline of History that “The Jewish religion, because it was a literature-sustained religion, led to the first efforts to provide elementary education for all children in the community.” Universal compulsory education did not exist in England until 1870; it existed in Israel eighteen centuries earlier. This Talmudic passage gives an overview of how it evolved.

May the name of Yehoshua ben Gamla be remembered for good, for were it not for him, the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. For at first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all. Then they made an ordinance that teachers of children should be appointed in Yerushalayim. Even then, however, if a child had a father, the father would take him to Yerushalayim to have him taught, but if not, the child would not go. They then ordained that teachers should be appointed in every district, and boys would enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. But then, if the teacher punished a child, the child would rebel and leave school. Eventually Yehoshua ben Gamla came and ordained that teachers of young children should be appointed in each district and town, and that children should enter school at the age of six or seven.

Abridged from Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 21a

1. What is universal education? Is there universal education where you live? Why is it important?
2. If we are worried about the Torah being forgotten, why teach it to children? Why not to adults who might have a greater understanding?
3. According to this source, how important is the role of teachers in Jewish history?



COMMUNITIES BUILT AROUND SCHOOLS



The history of the Jews has been a history of communities built around schools. They are the key institutions because they convey learning. Greek civilization survived for five hundred years after the Roman conquest of the Greek city-states, because the Greeks, like the Jews, had developed academies and they could live around those academies. When the academies failed, Greek civilization disappeared. The Jewish people has never allowed its academies to fail.

Daniel J. Elazar, *People and Polity*, p. 489

1. According to this source what is the secret to Jewish continuity?
2. Which Jewish academies is this source referring to? What is learnt in these academies? Do they still exist today?
3. How have the Jewish people managed to ensure its academies have never failed?

NON-JEWISH TESTIMONY



A twelfth century Christian monk wrote the following in one of his commentaries, in an age when most of Europe was illiterate:

The Jews, out of their zeal for God and their love of the Law, put as many sons as they have to letters, that each may understand God's Law . . . A Jew, however poor, if he had ten sons, would put them all to letters, not for gain, as the Christians do, but for the understanding of God's Law; and not only his sons but his daughters.

B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, p. 78

1. According to this source, what is the motivation for Jewish parents to educate their children?
2. Why is it important to understand God's laws?
3. Why do you think the source specifically mentions daughters as well as sons? Do you think this was controversial in the 12th century? Is it controversial today?



JEWISH EDUCATION IN THE SHTETL



From infancy the boy is guided and prodded towards scholarship. In the cradle he will listen to his mother's lullabies: "Sleep soundly at night and learn Torah by day / And thou'lt be a Rabbi when I have grown grey." The most important item in the family budget is the tuition fee that must be paid each term to the teacher of the younger boy's school. "Parents will bend the sky to educate their son." The mother, who has charge of household accounts, will cut the family food costs to the limit if necessary, in order to pay for her sons' schooling. If the worst comes to the worst, she will pawn her cherished pearls in order to pay for the school term. The boy must study, the boy must become a good Jew – for her, the two are synonymous.

Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People*, p. 85–87

1. Do you think education is really the most important item in the family budget?
2. Do you think the money spent on your Jewish education is an important use of resources?
3. What message are parents (both in the shtetl and today) sending their children by dedicating their finances to their children's Jewish education?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class, and share your thesis on how the Jewish people earned the reputation and title of the "People of the Book." Support your thesis with examples from your own life and community.

The Assignment



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

THE SECRET OF JEWISH CONTINUITY



The Israelites, slaves in Egypt for more than two hundred years, were about to go free... On the brink of their release Moshe, the leader of the Jews, gathered them together and prepared to address them. He might have spoken about freedom. He could have given a stirring address about the promised land to which they were traveling, the “land flowing with milk and honey.” Or he might have prepared them for the journey that lay ahead, the long march across the wilderness.

Instead... he spoke about children and the distant future, and the duty to pass on memory to generations yet unborn... About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators.

Freedom, Moshe suggested, is won, not on the battlefield, nor in the political arena, but in the human imagination and will. To defend a land you need an army. But to defend freedom you need education. You need families and schools to ensure that your ideals are passed on to the next generation, and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. The citadels of liberty are houses of study. Its heroes are teachers, its passion is education and the life of the mind. Moshe realized that a people achieves immortality not by building temples or mausoleums, but by engraving their values on the hearts of their children, and they on theirs, and so on until the end of time.

The Israelites built living monuments – monuments to life – and became a people dedicated to bringing new generations into being, and handing on to them the heritage of the past. Their great institutions were the family and education via the conversation between the generations. In place of temples they built houses of prayer and study. In place of stones they had words and teachings... In that counter-intuitive reversal they discovered the secret of eternity.

A Letter in the Scroll, p. 31–33

In this unit we have explored how the Jewish people have been molded into the “People of the Book” by their passionate commitment to education. This last quote from Rabbi Sacks beautifully and dramatically expresses the role of education in our religion, culture, and history.



Part 1: Working in small groups allocated by your teacher, create a visual representation of the descriptions found in this text. You may choose any form of visual arts (painting/drawing, animation, Power Point Presentation, etc.) to create your visual representation.

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.

