


TEN PATHS TO GOD

UNIT 7 – Educator Guide / Entry Level

אמונה FAITH *Love as Loyalty*

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

Overview: In this unit we will explore the path to God through Faith, using texts that Rabbi Sacks has selected and written. Faith, and our relationship with God, are such challenging areas for Jewish educators that all too often they are avoided altogether. It is our hope that the direction taken here will allow educators and students to explore with honesty and candor the critical questions of belief, faith, and approach to a relationship to God, in an appropriate, and constructive way. As Rabbi Sacks says, it takes a courageous educator to allow space in the classroom for challenging questions and honest, open inquiry into issues of faith and God, and we hope that this unit will provide the framework to enable that.

Educational aims for this unit:

- To encourage students to think about and explore their personal relationship with God.
- For students to consider the role of faith in Judaism, and their own faith journeys.
- For students to consider the value of questioning, even when questions seem to have no answers.
- For students to understand the notion that it takes courage to live with questions, and that is one definition of faith.
- For students to consider the role and impact of Jewish history in our faith journeys.
- For students to consider that faith is finding space for God, and to begin learning the skills to do that.

Trigger Activity: Finding Space for God

In the opening text for this unit, Rabbi Sacks concludes with the statement: "Faith is the space we create for God." God can be seen or sensed in each and every context that we find ourselves if we look hard enough and push ourselves to be sufficiently sensitive and perceptive. This trigger activity asks your students to do exactly that.

Take your class outside the building into nature (the school campus is great, but even better if you can afford the time to take them off campus into nature). Ask them to find a place to sit and be in their own space, where they will not be distracted by any of their classmates (but not too far away that you cannot see them or they cannot hear you). Ask them to close their eyes and meditate. On God. Where they can sense God. When they have experienced God in their lives. When in their lives they have felt closest to God, and when they have felt most distant. Ask them to look around. Can they sense God in this present moment? If they can, what do they wish to say to God at that moment?

Some students may find this experience easier or more powerful with music playing a part of the process. You could experiment with that, either allowing students to take their own personal music with headphones, or you could bring the class together and use a song of your choice (or your students' choice), to help the class connect to God together at that moment.

In theory, there is no reason why this process couldn't also be achieved inside the building as "God is where we let him in". But for students there are many distractions inside their school buildings that would make this more challenging. You could perhaps try it again at the end of the unit inside the building, and ask them to compare the experiences.



Watch: The opening video for Unit 7



■ **Discussion:** Ask the students for their initial reactions to the video.



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.

■ **Individual text work:** Ask the students to do this next activity on their own.



Judaism is an unusual, subtle, profoundly humane faith that challenges the conventional wisdom of the ages. Faith is the courage Avraham and Sarah showed when they heard the call of God and left behind all they had known to travel to an unknown destination. Faith led more than a hundred generations of our ancestors to continue that journey, knowing all the risks yet believing that there is no greater privilege than to be part of it. Faith is the voice that says, 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me.'

Faith sustained Jews in the dark days of persecution. It led them never to give up hope that one day they would return to Israel, to Jerusalem and to freedom. Jews kept faith alive, and faith kept the Jewish people alive.

Faith is not certainty. It is the courage to live with uncertainty. It is not knowing all the answers. It is often the strength to live with the questions. It is not a sense of invulnerability. It is the knowledge that we are utterly vulnerable, but that it is precisely in our vulnerability that we reach out to God, and through this learn to reach out to others, able to understand their fears and doubts. We learn to share, and in sharing discover the road to freedom. It is only because we are not gods that we are able to discover God.

God is the personal dimension of existence, the 'Thou' beneath the 'It', the 'Ought' beyond the 'Is', the Self that speaks to self in moments of total disclosure. Opening ourselves to the universe we find God reaching out to us. At that moment we make the life-changing discovery that though we seem utterly insignificant, we are utterly significant, a fragment of God's presence in the world. Eternity preceded us, infinity will come after us, yet we know that this day, this moment, this place, this circumstance, is full of the light of infinite radiance, whose proof is the mere fact that we are here to experience it.

Faith is where God and human beings touch across the abyss of infinity. *Emunah* means faithfulness, love-as-loyalty. The closest analogue is marriage: a mutual commitment, entered into in love, binding the partners together in fidelity and trust. God chose us – we chose God, and though



our relationship has sometimes been tense and troubled, the bond between us is unbreakable.

Knowing, we are known. Feeling, we are felt. Acting, we are acted upon. Living, we are lived. And if we make ourselves transparent to existence, then our lives too radiate that Divine presence which, celebrating life, gives life to those whose lives we touch.

Faith is the space we create for God.

Jonathan Sacks

Frontal teaching: Ask for a list of words or concepts that students had trouble understanding. Write them on the board. Discuss them briefly to clarify their basic meaning.



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.

Chavruta text analysis: Pair up the students and ask them to read through the text once more, this time using the questions to guide their discussion. You may wish to ask them to write down their answers, or to use the questions as an oral guide to their textual analysis.

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Faith is the courage Avraham and Sarah showed

1. Is it courageous to have faith in God? Why?
2. Why did Avraham and Sarah need the courage of faith to do what they did?
3. Do you know anyone who made a similar journey? Did they need the courage of faith?

'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me.'

1. Do you know who wrote this originally? Can you find its source?
2. Why do you think Rabbi Sacks chose this quote to make his point?
3. During which periods of Jewish history could this quote be an appropriate description of the courage to find faith? Have you ever experienced anything in your life that makes this quote resonate personally?

return to Israel, to Jerusalem and to freedom

1. Why were these things something that Jews needed to have faith in?
2. Rabbi Sacks says faith meant that Jews never gave up hope for these things. Is there a difference between faith and hope?
3. Now we have these things, do we need to have faith in anything else?



the strength to live with the questions

1. What questions are there without answers that need faith to live with?
2. Do you have any questions that cannot be answered? How do you feel about these questions?
3. Does Judaism have all the answers?

the 'Thou' beneath the 'It'

"I and Thou" is a book and system of thought by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. He believes that we can interact with the world as an object (I-It) or in a relationship (I-Thou) and for man the ultimate meaningful relationship is the I-Thou with God.

1. What would a relationship with God be like if it was I-It?
2. What would a relationship with God be like if it was I-Thou?
3. Which one most accurately describes your relationship with God?

the 'Ought' beyond the 'Is'

1. The "is" is the reality of our world. What is that reality?
2. The "ought" is what the world could and should be like. How is it different from the "is"?
3. Why does God represent the "ought"?

a fragment of God's presence in the world

1. How are we "a fragment of God's presence in the world"?
2. Why does that make us "utterly significant"?
3. How does this knowledge change the way we live our lives?

Emunah means faithfulness, love-as-loyalty

1. What is the difference between *faith* and *faithfulness*?
2. Why do you think Rabbi Sacks defines *Emunah/faithfulness* as love-as-loyalty?
3. How does one show faithfulness to God? How does He show the same to us?



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?

■ **Frontal teaching:** Facilitate a class discussion on the text based on the students' answers.

Exploring our Faith through 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 source helps you understand the core concept it is connected to. Use the questions to guide your discussion and analysis.

Group text analysis: Pair up two or more of the *chavrutot* from the previous section. Allocate each *chabura* one of the core concepts to begin with to make sure all are covered in preparation for the classroom discussion at the end. If there is time, the students can look at other core concepts when they have finished. Direct them to read through the supplementary sources together, and to use the questions to guide their discussion. You may tell them to write down their answers, or to use the questions as an oral guide to their textual analysis. Ask them to focus on how the supplementary sources expand our understanding of the core concepts.

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Faith as defiance

WHOM THEN SHALL I FEAR?

אֲדָרִי וַיִּשְׁעֵי מִמֶּנִּי אֵיךְ יְהוָה מַעֲזֹחֵי מִמֶּנִּי אֶפְחָד: בִּקְרֹב עָלַי וּמְרִיעִים לֹאכֹל
אֶת־בְּשָׁרִי צָרִי וְאֵיבִי לִי הִמָּה כְּשָׁלוֹ וְנִפְלוּ: אֶס־תַּחֲנֶנָּה עָלַי וּמַחֲנֶנָּה לֹא־יִירָא לִבִּי אֶס־תִּקְוֶם עָלַי
מִלְחָמָה בְּזֹאת אֲנִי בֹטֵחַ:

The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men close in on me to devour my flesh it is they, my enemies and foes, who stumble and fall. Should an army besiege me, my heart would not fear. Should war break out against me, still I would be confident.

Tehillim 27:1–3

RABBI JOSEPH SCHNEERSON: TWO WORLDS, ONE GOD

Rabbi Joseph Schneerson ran a seminary in Russia. When the Communists came to power they ordered all religious seminaries to close. Rabbi Schneerson defied the order and continued teaching religion.

One day a government officer confronted him and ordered him to close his school. The Rebbe refused. The officer pulled out a gun and said, 'You



will close the school or you will be killed.' Rabbi Schneerson showed no emotion and quietly responded, 'The school will remain open.'

The officer could not help being impressed by the Rabbi's calm demeanor and complete lack of fear. 'Don't you take me seriously?' he asked. 'Aren't you afraid of dying?'

The Rabbi responded calmly, 'Someone who has only one world and many gods is afraid of dying. Someone who has two worlds and only one God has no fear.'

Rabbi Schneerson's yeshiva remained open. In 1940 he transplanted it to the United States. Today it has branches throughout the world. Russian communism is no more.

Adapted from Abraham J. Twerski, Do Unto Others, pp. 158–59

1. In your opinion, what are the darkest days of Jewish history? Do these dark times challenge your faith?
2. Are there periods of Jewish history that reinforce your faith?
3. Does the quote from Tehillim resonate with you? Do you think it would have been a source of strength for you if you had lived during the darkest days of Jewish history?
4. Do you find Rabbi Schneerson's profound courage and faith in the face of such danger an inspiration? Do you think you would have been able to show similar courage?
5. What does the conclusion of the story (that the yeshiva remained open until today, while Russian communism is no more) say about Rabbi Schneerson's faith? Does that impact your own faith?

It is the courage to live with uncertainty.

A faith of questions – living with uncertainty

DID YOU ASK A GOOD QUESTION TODAY?

Isidore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize in physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied, 'My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, "What did you learn today?" But my mother used to ask a different question. "Izzy," she always used to say, "Did you ask a good question today?" That made the difference. Asking good questions made me a scientist.'

Judaism is a religion of questions. The greatest prophets asked questions of God. The Book of Iyov, the most searching of all explorations of human suffering, is a book of questions asked by man, to which God replies with





a string of questions of His own. The seder service on Pesach begins with four questions asked by a child.

When I first went to study at a yeshivah I was struck by the way the teacher's face would light up when we asked a question. *Du fregst a gutte kashe*, 'You raise a good objection,' was his highest form of praise. Abraham Twerski, an American psychiatrist, tells of how, when he was young, his instructor would relish challenges to his arguments. In his broken English he would say, 'You right! You a hundred prozent right! Now I show you where you wrong.'

Religious faith, in Judaism, is not naïve or blind. Every question asked in reverence is the start of a journey towards God. When faith suppresses questions, it dies. When it accepts superficial answers, it begins to wither. Faith is not opposed to doubt. What it is opposed to is the shallow certainty that what we understand is all there is.

Jonathan Sacks, *Celebrating Life*, pp. 79–81

1. Rabbi Sacks says faith is the courage to live with uncertainty. What uncertainties in life do you think he is referring to?
2. Why does it take courage to live with uncertainty? What is the alternative?
3. Why ask questions that have no answers?
4. Why would faith (or faith leaders) wish to suppress questions? Does Judaism suppress questions?
5. What questions do you have? If you could stand in the presence of God and ask any questions at all, what would you ask?

though our relationship has sometimes been tense and troubled

Faith as defiance against God

A JEW I SHALL REMAIN

Solomon ibn Verga, (Spain/Italy, 15th–16th Century), was one of the rare Jewish historians of the Middle Ages. In his account of the Spanish Expulsion, he told this story:

I heard from some of the elders who came out of Spain that one of the boats was infested with the plague, and the captain of the boat put the passengers ashore at some uninhabited place. There, most of them died of starvation, while some of them gathered all their strength to set out on foot in search of some settlement.

There was one Jew among them who struggled on afoot together with





his wife and two children. The wife grew faint and died, because she was not accustomed to so much difficult walking. The husband carried his children along until both he and they fainted from hunger. When he regained consciousness, he found that his two children had died.

In great grief he rose to his feet and said: 'O Lord of all the universe, You are doing a great deal that I might even desert my faith. But know You of a certainty that – even against the will of heaven – a Jew I am and a Jew I shall remain. And neither that which You have brought upon me nor that which You may yet bring upon me will be of any avail.'

Thereupon he gathered some earth and some grass, and covered the boys, and went forth in search of a settlement.

Solomon ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehudah*, pp. 89–94,
cited in Nahum Glatzer, *A Jewish Reader*, p. 204

1. Why do you think Rabbi Sacks says "our relationship has sometimes been tense and troubled"?
2. Do you sometimes have a tense and troubled relationship with God? Why?
3. Do you also feel your bond with God is unbreakable?
4. The Jew in the story is angry at God. Why do you think that is?
5. Is he rebelling against God, or showing loyalty to God? Could it be both?

celebrating life, gives life to those whose lives we touch

Faith as inspiration to others

TO LIGHT A FIRE

Some people wear their faith like an overcoat. It only warms them, but does not benefit others at all. But some light a fire, and also warm others.

Menachem Mendl of Kotzk (The Kotzker Rebbe)

1. How can the way we live and celebrate our lives inspire others to live their lives?
2. How can we make our faith a fire to warm others rather than a coat to just warm ourselves?



The miracle of faith to inspire

Faith after the Holocaust

Rabbi Yekutiel Halberstam, the Klausenberger Rebbe, lived through the Warsaw Ghetto, the work camps, the death march to Dachau, and then Auschwitz itself. He survived, but his wife and eleven children did not. In Auschwitz, he vowed that if he survived he would dedicate himself to life. He resolved to build a hospital that would honor the image of God in every human being. It took him fifteen years to raise the money, but eventually he built the Laniado Hospital in Netanya, Israel, dedicated to treating everyone alike, Jew and Arab, Israeli and Palestinian. This is what he taught his followers after the Holocaust:

The biggest miracle of all is the one that we, the survivors of the Holocaust, after all that we witnessed and lived through, still believe and have faith in the Almighty God, may His name be blessed. This, my friends, is the miracle of miracles, the greatest miracle ever to have taken place.

Yaffa Eliach, Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust, p. 228

1. Do you find survivors of the Holocaust inspiring? How so?
2. Some survivors lost their faith because of their experiences during the Holocaust. Does this take away from the miracle the Klausenberger Rebbe is describing?
3. Why do you think building the Laniado Hospital was so important to him after he settled in Netanya?

Faith is the space we create for God.

Faith is making space for God

WHERE WE LET HIM IN

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787–1859) was one of the most remarkable figures of the Jewish mystical movement known as Chassidism. Angular, unconventional, passionate in his search for truth, he spent his life ‘wrestling with God and with men’.

On one occasion, at the third Shabbat meal, when the atmosphere of the holy day is at its most intense, the Rebbe turned to his disciples and asked, ‘Where does God live?’

They were stunned by the strangeness of the question. ‘What does the Rebbe mean, “Where does God live?” Where does God *not* live? Surely



we are taught that there is no place devoid of His presence. He fills the heavens and the earth.'

'No,' said the Rebbe. 'You have not understood. *God lives where we let Him in.*'

God is always here, but we sense Him only when we search. He teaches, but only when we are ready to learn. He speaks, but only when we listen. The question is never, Where is God? It is always, Where are we? The problem of faith is not God but humankind. The task of faith is to create an openness in the soul through which the Divine presence can enter. God lives where we let Him in.

Adapted from a well-known Chassidic tale

1. What do you think Rabbi Sacks means by "Faith is the space we create for God"? Why do we need to make space for God?
2. What do you think the Kotzker Rebbe meant when he said "God lives where we let him in"?
3. "God is always here, but we sense Him only when we search". Are you searching for God? Where?
4. Where can you sense God? Where do you make space for Him?
5. Do you find faith easy to come by? Do you find it needs constant hard work?



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

If you feel comfortable during the discussion, share with the class your own faith journey. These questions may help you:

1. Do you find faith, and a relationship with God, easy to come by?
2. What is the source of your faith?
3. What are the biggest challenges to your faith?
4. Sometimes there are questions of faith that we just can't answer. Do you find yourself seeking answers to such questions?
5. If so, how do you reconcile those questions with your faith?
6. Do you find Jewish history a challenge to your faith, or a source of strength?
7. Have you found the sources that you have studied in this unit challenging to your faith, or have they helped to strengthen it?



Frontal teaching: Facilitate a class discussion on the texts based on the students' answers.

If you feel your students are confident and able to open up about aspects of their own faith journeys, then ask them to share their personal reflections on these seven questions. It is important to create a safe environment for real sharing, where everyone's feelings and experiences are validated. While this may prove educationally challenging, it is an opportunity for growth for your students.

The Assignment



Part 1: Become a Faith Researcher. Faith is a unique journey for each person, but are there any common aspects shared among us? In this unit we have explored our own faith journeys and the faith of our class mates. For this assignment you will research the faith of a range of people by collecting answers to the questionnaire below. Gather the data and analyze the responses you were given. For example, are you able to identify any patterns in the data? Did you find anything surprising? How did the answers given by the participants in the survey compare with your own answers, and with the discussions that you and your classmates had in class about these topics?

Your sample (the group of people you are researching) must include at least one religious leader (for example a rabbi), a teacher from your school, a grandparent, a parent, a friend, and finally, yourself. You may include as many people as you like in your research.

How you collect the data is up to you. Options include personal interviews, emailing the questionnaire, or creating an online questionnaire.

Your final product should include a summary of the answers you collected, a paragraph of analysis for each question, and an overall conclusion of the results of your survey.

Faith Questionnaire:

1. Name (optional)
2. What is your relationship to the researcher?
3. Where do you live?
4. Describe yourself as a Jew.
5. Do you find faith, and a relationship with God, easy to come by?
6. What is the source of your faith?
7. What are the biggest challenges to your faith?
8. Sometimes there are questions of faith that we just can't answer. Do you find yourself seeking answers to such questions?
9. If so, how do you reconcile those questions with your faith?
10. Do you find Jewish history a challenge to your faith, or a source of strength?



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.



Project based learning: This assignment asks your students to now look at the ideas they have studied in this unit in the world outside of their classroom. It gives them an opportunity to openly engage with the many people in their lives, such as parents, teachers and religious leaders, on a subject that is frequently shied away from. In doing so, they are likely to find that it is common among all levels and age groups to have questions of faith, and that for many people faith is a life-long journey. This realization may well strengthen the students own faith, and increase their sense of belonging, knowing they are not alone in questioning their faith.

You may wish to set up an online questionnaire template (there are many appropriate free platforms such as Google Forms, SurveyMonkey etc.) and have all the results collated centrally. Another option is to reframe the questions in such a way that answers are given on a scale of 1–10, with an opportunity for comments, and this will give you numerical data that can also be analyzed as a class.



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