

TEN PATHS TO GOD

UNIT 8 – Student Guide / Advanced Level

ישראל ISRAEL *The Jewish Land*

Based on the teachings of Rabbi Sacks



Introduction

Watch: The opening video for Unit 8



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.

No religion in history has been as closely tied to a land as has Judaism. That connection goes back almost 4,000 years, from the first words of God to Avraham: 'Leave your country, your birthplace and your father's house and go to the land I will show you.' No sooner had he arrived than God said: 'To your offspring I will give this land.' Seven times God promised the land to Avraham, and promised it again to Yitzchak and Yaakov.

The word *teshuvah*, often translated as 'repentance', literally means 'homecoming' in a double sense: spiritually to God, and physically to the land of Israel. For Israel is the Jewish people's place of destiny: a tiny land for a tiny people, yet one whose role in religious history is vast. It is the land to which Moshe and the Israelites travelled across the desert, the land from which they were exiled twice, the land to which our ancestors journeyed whenever they could and which they never voluntarily left, never relinquished. Jewish history is the story of the longing for a land.

The holy land remains the place where Jews were summoned to create a society of justice and compassion under the sovereignty of God. And though it was subsequently held holy by Christianity and Islam, the centers of these other faiths were elsewhere: for Western Christians, Rome, for Eastern Christians, Constantinople, and for Muslims, Mecca and Medinah. There are 56 Islamic states today, 82 Christian ones, but only one Jewish state. It is the only place on earth where Jews are a majority, where they enjoy self-rule, where they are able to build a society and shape a culture as Jews.

The Balfour Declaration in 1917, subsequently ratified by the League of Nations, long before the Holocaust, was an attempt to rectify the lingering denial of a nation's right to its land and the subsequent persecution of Jews in country after country, century after century, in a history of suffering that has no parallel.

The Jews who returned were not strangers, outsiders, an imperial presence, a colonial force. They were the land's original inhabitants: the only people in 4,000 years who created an independent nation there. All other occupiers of the land – from the Assyrians and Babylonians to the

Ottomans and the British – were imperial powers, who ruled the land as a district of their vast realms. The Egyptians did not offer the Palestinians a state when they ruled Gaza between 1948 and 1967; neither did the Jordanians when they ruled the West Bank during those years. The only nation to have offered Palestinians a state is the State of Israel. And every day, we pray for its peace.

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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first words of God to Avraham

1. What is the implication that the first words God spoke to Avraham were, 'Leave your country, your birthplace and your father's house and go to the land I will show you'?
2. What is the meaning of these words?
3. Why do you think God decided to begin his relationship with Avraham with these words and this command? What does this mean for us?

'homecoming'

1. The literal meaning of the word *teshuvah* is 'return'. How is repentance a 'return'? What are we returning to?
2. Rabbi Sacks translates the word *teshuvah* as 'homecoming'. After we have done true *teshuvah* we are said to have 'returned'. How is this return like a homecoming?
3. Rabbi Sacks connects the 'homecoming' of *teshuvah* with the physical return to the Land of Israel. Can you explain the connection?

Jewish history is the story of the longing for a land.

1. Can you support this claim with proof from Jewish history?
2. Can you find proof of this in *halacha* and Jewish rituals?
3. Can you explain why the Jewish people never gave up on returning to their land?

It is the only place on earth where Jews are a majority

1. What are the effects of being a minority?
2. Why is it important to be a majority? What are the benefits?
3. How do you feel living as a minority in your country? Would you like to one day live in Israel because it has a Jewish majority? Why?



where they are able to build a society and shape a culture as Jews

1. Can Jews build a society, and shape the culture of that society, when they live in the diaspora?
2. What would a Jewish society look like?
3. Is Israel a Jewish society today? How so?

The Balfour Declaration

1. The Balfour Declaration was the first time since the birth of modern Zionism that a world power had recognized the Jewish people's claim to a homeland in *Eretz Yisrael*. Why did we need a world power to recognize this right?
2. On what basis did the Jewish people have a right to a land over which we had not been sovereign for 2000 years?
3. It is now over a hundred years since the Balfour Declaration. Do you think the world has come to terms with this right?

They were the land's original inhabitants

1. What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he claims that the Jews who heeded the call of modern Zionism and began returning to *Eretz Yisrael* from the 1880s onward were 'the land's original inhabitants'?
2. Who disagrees with Rabbi Sacks on this point? What is the basis of their argument?
3. What are your thoughts on this?

The only nation to have offered Palestinians a state is the State of Israel.

1. Why do you think no Palestinian state was created while other Arab nations were in power in this land?
2. Why do you think the State of Israel made these painful concessions to the Palestinian people, offering to help create a Palestinian state? Why do you think the Palestinian leadership rejected the offer?
3. What do you think needs to happen for peace to finally be achieved in the Land of Israel?

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*, consider the five core concepts contained in the opening text. Use the questions to guide your discussion and analysis.

No religion in history has been as closely **tied to a land** as has Judaism. That connection goes back almost 4,000 years, from the first words of God to Abraham: **'Leave your country, your birthplace and your father's house and go to the land I will show you.'** No sooner had he arrived than God said: **'To your offspring I will give this land.'** Seven times God promised the land to Abraham, and promised it again to Yitzchak and Yaakov.

The word *teshuvah*, often translated as 'repentance', literally means 'homecoming' in a double sense: spiritually to God, and physically to the land of Israel. For **Israel is the Jewish people's place of destiny**: a tiny land for a tiny people, yet one whose role in religious history is vast. It is the land to which Moshe and the Israelites travelled across the desert, the land from which they were exiled twice, the land to which our ancestors journeyed whenever they could and which they never voluntarily left, never relinquished. Jewish history is the story of the longing for a land.

The holy land remains the place where Jews were **summoned to create a society of justice and compassion** under the sovereignty of God. And though it was subsequently held holy by Christianity and Islam, the centers of these other faiths were elsewhere: for Western Christians, Rome, for Eastern Christians, Constantinople, and for Muslims, Mecca and Medinah. There are 56 Islamic states today, 82 Christian ones, but only one Jewish state. It is the only place on earth where Jews are a majority, where they enjoy self-rule, where they are able to build a society and shape a culture as Jews.

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tied to a land

1. In what way is Judaism 'tied to a land'?
2. If Judaism is so closely tied to a land, how do you think it has survived for so many generations in exile?
3. Do you think a Judaism in the diaspora is in anyway inferior to Judaism practiced in *Eretz Yisrael*?

'Leave your country, your birthplace and your father's house and go to the land I will show you.'

1. What *mitzvah* is Avraham being asked to perform here?
2. What were the challenges facing Avraham's *aliyah*? Are they the same challenges as those faced by *olim* today?
3. What reasons can you think of for making *aliyah*? Assuming you were living in the diaspora, could you imagine making *aliyah* yourself?

'To your offspring I will give this land.'

1. To which generation of Avraham's descendants do you think God is promising the land?
2. Why do you think God did not give the land to Avraham there and then?
3. Has this promise been fulfilled in history? When?

Israel is the Jewish people's place of destiny

1. What is destiny?
2. What is the Jewish people's destiny? How does it involve Israel?
3. What is your destiny? How does it correlate with your vision for the Jewish people?

summoned to create a society of justice and compassion

1. What would a society based on these ideas look like? How do you build such a society?
2. Do you think that the modern State of Israel is a society of justice and compassion?
3. Why has God summoned the Jewish people to do this?

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?





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

1. Why is *Eretz Yisrael* so central to Judaism?
2. What is the national mission of the Jewish people and how is it connected to having our own land?
3. Are we fulfilling this mission in our land today? If not, what can we do to achieve it?

The Miracle of the Rebirth of Israel



Together with your *chavruta* join another pair to form a small *chabura* (study group). Examine the following texts from *The Jonathan Sacks Haggadah*. Here Rabbi Sacks describes some of the miracles of the founding of the modern State of Israel, and discusses who was behind them. Use the guiding questions that follow each text to help you with your analysis, and at the same time consider these general underlying questions:

1. What is your definition of a miracle?
2. Can a miracle be man-made? If it can, is it still divine in origin?
3. If the story of the State of Israel is miraculous in nature, how does that impact the way we think of it?



So Zionism was born. It would be hard to find any other movement that brought together so many dissonant, competing visions. There were utopian religious Zionists like Rav Kook, and practical religious Zionists like Rabbi Reines. Among the secularists were political Zionists like Herzl, cultural Zionists such as Ahad ha-Am, Nietzscheans like Berdichevski, Tolstoyans of the caliber of Aaron David Gordon, and dozens of others, each with their own carefully wrought utopia. They clashed, at times vehemently. Yet out of their clamorous discord came one of the most astonishing achievements of all time.

The creation of the State of Israel was fraught with difficulty. Despite the Balfour Declaration (1917), in which Britain, the new mandatory power in Palestine, promised Jews a national home, there was intense opposition – from the Arab world, other international forces, from politicians in Britain, and at times from Jews themselves. For thirty years, various compromises were proposed, all accepted by Jews and rejected by their opponents. On the day the State was proclaimed, it was attacked on all fronts by its neighbors. Since then it has lived under constant threat of war, violence, terror and delegitimization. Yet it has achieved wondrous things.

The Jonathan Sacks Haggadah, pp. 51–52

1. Is it a miracle that so many different Zionists with such divergent views managed to join together to build the State of Israel?
2. What does 'utopia' mean? What does it mean that a Zionist philosophy is 'utopian'?
3. Which groups of people does Rabbi Sacks list as opposing the creation of the State of Israel? Why did each group oppose it?



4. Why do you think Israel has lived in a constant state of war ever since its creation?
5. Is it possible that this constant threat of war has had any advantage for Israel achieving 'wondrous things'?



Through it Hebrew, the language of the Bible, was reborn as a living tongue. Jewish communities under threat have been rescued, including those like the Jews of Ethiopia who had little contact with other Jews for centuries. Jews have come to Israel from over a hundred countries, representing the entire lexicon of cultural diversity. A desolate landscape has bloomed again. Jerusalem has been rebuilt. The world of Torah scholarship, devastated by the Holocaust, has been revived and the sound of learning echoes throughout the land. Economically, politically, socially and culturally, Israel's achievements are unmatched by any country of its age and size. The sages said that, at the crossing of the Red Sea, the simplest Jew saw miracles that the greatest of later prophets were not destined to see. That, surely, was the privilege of those who witnessed Israel's rebirth and youth. The messiah has not come. Israel is not yet at peace. The *Beit Hamikdash* has not been rebuilt. Our time is not yet redemption. Yet many, if not all, of the prayers of two thousand years have been answered...

Ibid, p. 52

1. Was the rebirth of the ancient language of the Bible into a modern vibrant language a miracle?
2. Why do you think the State of Israel feels a responsibility for the safety of Jews around the world, such as the Ethiopian Jewish community?
3. How did the Jews in Israel make the desert bloom? Is that a miracle?
4. Are there miracles in Israel's economic, political, social and cultural history?
5. Which of our prayers of two thousand years have not yet been answered? Does that change the way we see Israel?



The Irish historian Conor Cruise O'Brien once remarked that Jews who see themselves as unreligious are sometimes very religious indeed. That was true of Hess, Pinsker, Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion and many other heroes and pioneers of the return to Zion. They were not 'spiritual' nor did they observe many of the commandments. But the vision of the prophets and the covenant of Jewish history flowed through their veins. God works through people; sometimes, so the prophets taught, without their conscious knowledge and consent. It is difficult to reflect deeply on the rebirth of Israel without sensing the touch of heaven in the minds of men and women, leading them to play their parts in a drama so much greater than any individual could have executed, even conceived. The historian Barbara Tuchman, writes, 'Viewing this strange and singular history one cannot escape the impression that it must contain some special significance for the history of mankind, that in some way, whether one believes in divine providence or inscrutable circumstance, the Jews have been singled out to carry the tale of human fate.'

Ibid, p. 53

1. Do you think aspects of secular Zionism can be considered 'religious'?
2. What is the 'vision of the prophets and the covenant of Jewish history'?
3. What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he says the secular Zionists had the 'touch of heaven' in their minds? How do you think they would feel if they were to hear Rabbi Sacks' view of them?
4. Do you think that God has directed history through people who are not necessarily religious or aware of their religious impact?
5. Do you think that Jewish history contains 'some special significance for the history of mankind'? What do you think that significance might be?



Who then wrote the script of the Jewish drama? God, or the Jewish people? Or was it, as the sages taught, an inextricable combination of both: God as he was heard by the people, and the people as they responded to God? Isaac Bashevis Singer came close when he said, 'God is a writer and we are both the heroes and the readers.' One thing is certain, that without Pesach, celebrated over the centuries, the State of Israel would not have been born. The prophets were right: the exodus of the past contained within it the exodus of the future; and I, born in the same year as the State, can only say, 'Blessed are you, O Lord... who kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this day.'

Ibid, pp. 51–53

1. 'Who then wrote the script of the Jewish drama?' How would you answer this question?
2. What does it mean to be both the hero and the reader of Jewish history?
3. If God is the writer, can we still really be the heroes?
4. What connection do you think Rabbi Sacks is making between Pesach and the birth of the State of Israel?
5. Rabbi Sacks concludes this essay with the *beracha* of *Shehecheyanu*. What profound statement is he making about the State of Israel?



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 texts from you? Does their approach resonate with you?

Include your responses to the following questions in the class discussion:

1. What is your definition of a miracle?
2. Can a miracle be man-made? If it is, does that still make it divine in origin?
3. If the story of the State of Israel is miraculous in nature, how does that impact the way we think of it?

Why a Land?



The following quote is from Rabbi Sacks' book *Future Tense*, in the chapter *Israel, Gateway of Hope*. Here, Rabbi Sacks presents his vision for Judaism and the calling for the Jewish people, and why he believes this vision can only be fulfilled in the land of Israel and not as the religion of an exiled and dispersed people. Together with your *chavruta*, consider what the ideal Jewish society would look like in a Jewish state. Start by reading through the excerpt, and then use the questions that follow to formulate a description of Rabbi Sacks' vision.

ISRAEL IS THE JEWISH PEOPLE'S PLACE OF DESTINY



[Jewish] destiny was to create a society that would honor the proposition that we are all created in the image and likeness of God. It would be a place in which the freedom of some would not lead to the enslavement of others. It would be the opposite of Egypt, whose bread of affliction and bitter herbs of slavery they were to eat every year on the festival of Pesach to remind them of what they were to avoid. . . . *Judaism is the code of a self-governing society*. We tend to forget this, since Jews have lived in dispersion for two thousand years, without the sovereign power to govern themselves, and because modern Israel is a secular state. Judaism is a religion of redemption rather than salvation. It is about the shared spaces of our collective lives, not an interior drama of the soul . . .

[B]ecause Judaism is also the code of a society, it is also about the social virtues: righteousness (*tzedek/tzedakah*), justice (*mishpat*), loving-kindness (*chesed*) and compassion (*rachamim*). These structure the template of biblical law, which covers all aspects of the life of society, its economy, its welfare systems, its education, family life, employer–employee relations, the protection of the environment and so on.

The broad principles driving this elaborate structure, traditionally enumerated as 613 commands, are clear. No one should be left in dire poverty. No one should lack access to justice and the courts. No family should be without its share of the land. One day in seven, everyone should be free. One year in seven, all debts should be cancelled. One year in fifty, all land that had been sold was to revert to its original owners. It was the nearest thing the ancient world had ever seen to an egalitarian society.

None of this was possible without a land . . . Judaism is the constitution of a self-governing nation, the architectonics of a society dedicated to the service of God in freedom and dignity. Without a land and state, Judaism is a shadow of itself. In exile, God might still live in the hearts of Jews but



not in the public square, in the justice of the courts, the morality of the economy and the humanitarianism of everyday life.

Jews have lived in almost every country under the sun. *In four thousand years, only in Israel have they been a free, self-governing people.* Only in Israel are they able, if they so choose, to construct an agriculture, a medical system, an economic infrastructure in the spirit of the Torah and its concern for freedom, justice and the sanctity of life. Only in Israel can Jews today speak the Hebrew of the Bible as the language of everyday speech. Only there can they live Jewish time within a calendar structured according to the rhythms of the Jewish year. Only in Israel can Jews live Judaism in anything other than an edited edition. In Israel, and only there, Jews can walk where the prophets walked, climb the mountains Avraham climbed, lift their eyes to the hills that David saw, and continue the story their ancestors began.

Future Tense, pp. 135–136

1. According to Rabbi Sacks, what is Jewish destiny?
2. Rabbi Sacks contrasts Judaism, the religion of a nation in its land, with other more individualistic religions. Explain each term and phrase below that defines Judaism, and contrast it from other forms of religion:
 - a. Judaism is the code of a self-governing society.
 - b. Judaism is a religion of redemption rather than salvation.
 - c. Judaism is about the shared spaces of our collective lives, not an interior drama of the soul.
 - d. Judaism is the constitution of a self-governing nation.
 - e. Judaism is the architectonics of a society.
3. Rabbi Sacks says that “without a land and state, Judaism is a shadow of itself”. What do you think he means?
4. Does this mean the Judaism of exile is a “shadow of itself”? Do you agree with him?
5. These are the values that Rabbi Sacks believes must be at the core of a Jewish society: righteousness (*tzedek/tzedakah*); justice (*mishpat*); loving-kindness (*chesed*); compassion (*rachamim*). Complete the table on the following page describing how these values can be upheld by individuals, communities, and as a nation living in its own land.



Value	Individual	Community	Nation State
<i>Tzedek/Tzedakah</i>			
<i>Mishpat</i>			
<i>Chessed</i>			
<i>Rachamim</i>			

6. What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he says that in the diaspora Judaism lives only in “the hearts of Jews but not in the public square”?
7. What does Rabbi Sacks say can only be done in Israel? Do you agree with him?
8. Do you agree that a Judaism lived in the diaspora is an “edited version” as Rabbi Sacks describes?
9. Do you think modern day Israel is fulfilling Rabbi Sacks’ vision for a Jewish society?
10. Are these arguments having an impact on your view of *aliyah*?

Why This Land?



In the previous section we explored the importance of having a land as the center of the vision and destiny of Judaism and the Jewish people. In this section we will look at the question 'Why this land?' Why is *Eretz Yisrael* the chosen location for the fulfillment of the destiny of the Jewish people? Together with your *chavruta*, examine the sources, and using the questions that follow each source formulate the answer Rabbi Sacks gives us to this question.

A PROTEST AGAINST IMPERIALISM



Why there? The Bible doesn't say. We can only speculate. But implicit in the biblical narrative is an answer. Israel is a place from which it is impossible to build an empire. The geography is wrong. The Judean hills in one direction, the Sinai desert in the other, block easy access to surrounding lands. The coastal plain is narrow and, in ancient times, open to easy attack from the sea.

The cradle of civilization was not there. It was in the alluvial plains of the Tigris-Euphrates valley and the rich, well-watered lands of the lower Nile. It was in Mesopotamia that the first city-states were built, and in Egypt that the greatest and longest-lived of ancient empires had its base. So Israel would almost invariably be a small country at the juncture of powerful empires, in a simultaneously strategic and vulnerable location on major trade routes.

Future Tense, pp. 137–138

1. Is it true that nowhere in the Torah is a reason given for why the Land of Israel was chosen? Does it describe Israel in any terms? Is this the same as explaining why it was chosen?
2. Rabbi Sacks describes the geography of Israel, demonstrating that not only is it inappropriate for the building of an empire, but that any civilization there would be hard to defend. Does Jewish history bear this out?
3. From the perspective of Jewish history, what do Mesopotamia and Egypt have in common? What message can you learn from this??
4. Why does the fact that Israel is at the junction of major ancient trade routes lead to increased vulnerability?
5. Can you think of a positive angle on living in a place of such vulnerability?



י כִּי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה בֹא־שָׂמָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ לֹא כְאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הָהִוא אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאתָם מִשָּׁם אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע
 יא אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ וְהִשְׁקִיתָ בְּרִגְלְךָ כְּגֵן הָיִרְקָה: וְהָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּם עֹבְרִים שָׂמָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ אֶרֶץ הָרִים
 יב וּבְקֻצֹת לַמָּטָר הַשָּׁמַיִם תִּשְׁתַּה־מֵיָם: אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תִּמְכֹּד עֵינֶי יְהוָה
 יג אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ מִרְשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה: וְהָיָה אִם־שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתַי
 יד אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוָּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לֵאמֹר לַאֲהָבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל־לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם:
 יו וְנָתַתִּי מָטָר־אֲרָצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאֶסְפַּת דִּגְנְךָ וְתִירֶשְׁךָ וַיִּצְהָרְךָ:

For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come. There the grain you sowed had to be watered by your own labors, like a vegetable garden;

But the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, soaks up its water from the rains of heaven.

It is a land which the LORD your God looks after, on which the LORD your God always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end.

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the LORD your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul,

I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil.

Devarim 11:10-14

1. Is it an advantage or disadvantage that Israel is dependent on rain?
2. What is Egypt's water source? If you were a farmer would you rather live in Egypt or Israel?
3. Is it good or bad for the farmer that God always keeps his eye on the land?
4. God promises He will guarantee the rain on what condition?
5. From these verses, which do you think sounds like a better place to live, Israel or Egypt? Explain your answer.

WHERE GEOGRAPHY AND SPIRITUALITY MEET



Israel is not the Nile delta or the Tigris-Euphrates valley. It is a land dependent on rain, and rain in that part of the world is not predictable... But the passage intimates a correlation between geography and spirituality. Israel is a place where people look up to heaven in search of rain, not down to earth and its natural water supply. It is a place where you have to pray, not one in which nature and its seasons are predictable.

That is part of a larger narrative. Because the terrain of Israel is such that it cannot become the base of an empire, it will constantly be at threat from larger and stronger neighboring powers. Israel will always find itself outnumbered. It will need to rely on exceptional courage from its soldiers, and ingenuity in battle. That will take high national morale, which in turn



will require from the people a sense of belonging to a just and inclusive society.

Commitment will be needed from every individual. They will need to feel that their cause is justified and that they are fighting for something worth preserving. So the entire configuration of the Torah's social ethics, whose guardians were the prophets, is already implicit in the kind of geo-political entity Israel is and will be. It would always be a small and highly vulnerable country, set in a strategic location at the junction of three continents, Europe, Africa and Asia... as with its agriculture, so with its battles: Israel is a people that must lift its eyes to heaven.

Future Tense, pp. 139–140

1. Rabbi Sacks seems to suggest Israel's dependence on the unreliable rain as a source of water is a good thing. How is that so?
2. With this new understanding, how would you view the central narratives in the Torah, in particular Avraham turning his back on Mesopotamia and the empire built on the prosperity of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and Moshe taking his people away from the empire of the ancient Egyptians built on the prosperity of the Nile river?
3. Some countries produce strong fighters, some produce ingenious and creative artisans. According to Rabbi Sacks, what type of people does the Land of Israel produce?
4. According to Rabbi Sacks, what is the connection between the geography of the Land of Israel and spirituality?
5. Where would you rather live as a Jew: Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Western world today, or Israel?

Share your analysis: Come together as a class and discuss your answers and reflections on the sources.

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

1. What message to the Jewish people is carried in the physical geography of the Land of Israel?
2. Why did God choose the Land of Israel to be the homeland of the Jewish people?
3. Does what you have learned in this section connect to what you learned in the previous section, i.e. that the fulfillment of the destiny and vision of Judaism is the creation of a society in the Land of Israel?

The State of Israel



Analysis: In the previous two sections we explored Rabbi Sacks' view of the role of the Land of Israel. We have seen that Rabbi Sacks believes the destiny of the Jewish people is "to create a society that would honor the proposition that we are all created in the image and likeness of God," and that "Judaism is the code of a self-governing society" that can only be achieved in its own land. In this final section, we will evaluate how the modern State of Israel is fulfilling this destiny, and understand how Rabbi Sacks thinks it must change in order to do so.

First we need a refresher in the difference between a state and a society. In Unit 6, *The Way of Chessed*, we studied the following quote from Rabbi Sacks' book *The Home We Build Together*. Here, he defines a *social covenant* and distinguishes it from a *social contract*. In that unit you were asked to write two headings on a piece of paper, Social Contract and Social Covenant and to make a list of defining characteristics for each. If you have already studied Unit 6, then review the notes you made there. If you have not, do this activity now after reading the text.



Covenants and contracts are different things and address different aspects of our humanity. In a contract, what matters is that both gain. In a covenant, what matters is that both give. Contracts are agreements entered into for mutual advantage. They are undertaken by individuals or groups on the basis of self-interest. They have specific purposes. They can be terminated by mutual consent. They end once both parties have fulfilled their obligations. By contrast, covenants are moral commitments, and they are open-ended. They are sustained not by letter of law or by self-interest but by loyalty, fidelity, faithfulness. In fact the key word of Judaism, *emunah*, usually translated as 'faith', is better translated as faithfulness.

Social contract creates a state; social covenant creates a society. Social contract is about power and how it is to be handled within a political framework. Social covenant is about how people live together despite their differences. Social contract is about government. Social covenant is about coexistence. Social contract is about laws and their enforcement. Social covenant is about the values we share. Social contract is about the use of potentially coercive force. Social covenant is about moral commitments, the values we share and the ideals that inspire us to work together for the sake of the common good.

The Home We Build Together, pp. 109–110



Now let's apply our definitions to the modern State of Israel. The next quote is from a chapter in Rabbi Sacks' book *Future Tense* entitled *New Zionism*. Together with your *chavruta*, use the definitions of 'state' and 'society' as described by Rabbi Sacks and apply them to Israel today. Use the questions that follow the text to guide your discussion.



The history of Zionism was dominated from the outset by the idea of state rather than society. This was understandable, given its historical origins. Jews in the Diaspora had, if not a society, then at least a community of communities. What they lacked was political power, sovereignty, a state. It was the birth of the European nation state that created modern antisemitism, because for the first time the question was asked: are Jews really Frenchmen or Germans, or are they merely Jews residing in Germany and France? Herzl understood that if the nation state created the problem, it also contained the solution. Jews must have a nation state of their own.

So it was not accidental that the most powerful effort to create a national culture, that of Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, was called *mamlachtiut*, 'statism', placing the state at the heart of identity... the essence of *mamlachtiut* was the primacy of the state over civil society, secular law over tradition and custom, government institutions over voluntary bodies.

The result was that, though Israel managed remarkably the transition from powerlessness to power, it did so at the cost of weakening the very institutions that had been the source of Jewish strength in the past: communities, charities, voluntary associations and community-based schools. Even religion became a branch of the state. So, while the state grew strong, society grew weak. Instead of an *edah*, there were *edot* in the plural: in place of a single national community, there was an endless proliferation of local communities, differentiated by ethnicity, culture and their place on the religious-secular spectrum. Each had its own political party or parties. Every battle was fought in the political arena.

Future Tense, pp. 168–170

1. What is Zionism? Why was it focused on 'state' rather than 'society'?
2. Why was having a state so important to Jews in Europe in the 19th century?
3. Why did Ben Gurion place the 'state' at the center of the new State of Israel?
4. What did he sacrifice in order to do this?
5. Can you think of any examples that still exist in Israel today of sacrifices that have been made in society in order to make a state?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class and discuss your answers and reflections on the texts. Make sure you address the most important question: Is Israel today a 'state' or a 'society'?



Further analysis: In this chapter, Rabbi Sacks continues to explore these questions and considers how Israel can become more like a civil society based on a social covenant rather than the social contract of a state. Together with your *chavruta* join another pair to form a small *chabura* (study group), and explore this question with Rabbi Sacks using the following texts together with the questions that follow.



[The] challenge is to re-empower civil society. The extraordinary fact is that, for twenty centuries without a state, Jewish communities throughout history managed to create their own educational, health and welfare systems, all run on purely voluntary lines. Few if any would suggest today that in Israel education, healthcare and welfare should be privatized, but this entire tradition of voluntary self-help was Jewry's greatest strength in the past, and it has been twice threatened in Israel. The first time, the threat came from *mamlachtiut* itself, the belief that whatever was to be done for the common good should be done by the state, a view that owes more to East European socialism than to Judaism. The second time it came from the adoption of Thatcherism and Reaganomics and reliance on the market rather than the state. The result was the growth of consumerism and what J.K. Galbraith called private affluence and public poverty. Neither of these is the covenantal way.

The state and the market have a different logic from that of covenant. The state is about the concentration and application of power. The market is about the production and distribution of wealth. These are two primary modes of human organization. We get people to act in the way we want, either by forcing them to – the way of power – or by paying them to – the way of wealth.

Future Tense, p. 174

1. What are the advantages of running educational, health and welfare systems on voluntary lines rather than through the central state?
2. Why does the market and consumerism lead to "private affluence and public poverty"?
3. If the state is about the application and regulation of power, and the market is about the production and distribution of wealth, what is covenant and civil society about?
4. To help answer this last question Rabbi Sacks continues in the chapter with a thought experiment which is paraphrased here:
 - a. Imagine you have total power, then you decide to share it with nine others. What are you left with?
 - b. Suppose you have a thousand dollars, and decide to share it with nine others. What are you left with?



- c. Now suppose that you decide to share not power or wealth, but love, friendship, influence, or even knowledge, with nine others. What do you have now?

Rabbi Sacks writes that there is a third way, not the power of the state, or the wealth of the market, but the love and relationship of covenantal society:



The reason is that love, friendship and influence are things that only exist by virtue of sharing. I call these *covenantal goods* – goods such that, the more I share, the more I have. In the short term at least, wealth and power are zero-sum games. If I win, you lose. If you win, I lose. Covenantal goods are non-zero-sum games, meaning, if I win, you also win. Wealth and power, economic and politics, the market and the state, are arenas of *competition*. Covenantal goods are arenas of *co-operation*. The home of covenantal goods is not the state or the market but civil society: families, communities, schools, congregations, fellowships (*chevrot*), communities, and society itself once we have clearly differentiated society from state. Covenantal goods exist wherever human relationships are structured not around wealth or power but around collective belonging and shared responsibility, around, in other words, the principle of ‘All Israel are responsible for one another.’

Future Tense, pp. 174–175



In the final text of this section, read through the continuation of the chapter in your *chabura*, and with the help of the questions that follow, consider how Rabbi Sacks challenges the modern State of Israel to become a society based on social covenant.



The shape of Israel's civil society is set out in Tehillim 146 as the way of God: 'He secures justice for the oppressed. He gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets captives free. The Lord gives sight to the blind. The Lord raises those bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous. The Lord protects the stranger. He gives courage to the orphan and widow.' It is there in every syllable of Diaspora Jewish life, in the social infrastructures Jews created voluntarily because they had no state to turn to. It is there in the basic idea of the Jewish polity, namely a society of equal dignity in which no one is condemned to poverty or solitude, in which Jews sustain one another through the thousand filaments of connectedness, caring for the sick, visiting the lonely, comforting the bereaved, giving hospitality to strangers: the vision of what Aharon Lichtenstein called 'societal beatitude' which was Jewry's greatest contribution to the moral vocabulary of humankind.

Future Tense, pp. 175–176

1. What can the State of Israel learn from Diaspora Jewish life?
2. Where did Jews in the Diaspora learn this?
3. How would the State of Israel implement this? Do you think this already exists in Israeli society today?



A Judaic civil society depends on the highest priority being given to education. Judaism created the world's first system of universal education, and remains the supreme example of a civilization predicated on schools and houses of study. Education, in Judaism, is the keystone of the social structure. It is the best way of securing equality and human dignity. It must be the top item in any budget. Jews knew that to defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilization you need schools. Education is the Jewish ministry of defence.

Equally, it is here at the level of civil society that Israel must integrate all entire population, Jewish, Muslim or Christian, as equal citizens, 'the stranger in your midst,' giving non-Jews precisely the level of dignity and respect that Jews would wish were the roles reversed: 'Do not oppress the stranger because you know what it feels like to be a stranger' (Shemot 23: 9).

Future Tense, p. 176



1. Why is education so important in a society based on social covenant?
2. Do you agree with Rabbi Sacks that Israel, a Jewish state, must integrate all minorities equally into society? Why?
3. How does Jewish history help us realize the importance of protecting minorities?



That is the challenge of Judaism in the State of Israel in our time. Its place is not in party politics, not as an arm of the state, not as a set of segregated enclaves, not as an 'adversary culture', and not as a territorial ideology. Its role is to create, shape, drive and motivate civil society. If religion is not seen by Israelis as a unifying force in society, if religious Jews are not admired for their work with the poor, the lonely and the vulnerable, if Judaism is not the voice of justice and compassion, then something is wrong in the soul of Israel. To be sure, some of this work happens already; there are admirable examples. But there is much more to be done. Judaism in Israel today has lost the prophetic instinct when it needs it most...

Societies need hope. Covenantal societies need high moral aspiration. Israel faces a long and difficult struggle to find peace. There is a real and present danger of national despair. Peace is not something one side can achieve alone: it is always a duet, never a solo. There is nothing Israel can do to guarantee peace. But there is something it can do to recapture the moral energy that went into the building of the land. It can renew the social covenant. It can create a new civic Judaism, one that embraces religious and secular, Jew and Palestinian alike. Zionism, phase 1, gave back to Jewry what it lacked in dispersion: sovereignty and a state. Zionism phase 2 must reappropriate what Jewry had even when it lacked a state, namely a profound sense of responsibility to the weak, the poor, the socially marginalized, the neglected and unheard. That is the challenge for a new religious Zionism: to build a society worthy of being a home for the divine presence by honoring the divine image in all its citizens.

Future Tense, pp. 178–180

1. If religion's impact in society is through party politics, what is often the outcome?
2. How can religion become a unifying force in society instead?
3. What does Rabbi Sacks believe is the challenge for a new religious Zionism? What is "Zionism phase 2"?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class and discuss your answers and reflections on the texts. Make sure you address the critical question: How can Judaism renew the social covenant in the State of Israel?

The Assignment



In this unit we have explored the role of the Land of Israel in Judaism and the destiny of the Jewish people. We have also considered the story of the modern State of Israel and reflected on its miraculous nature, and the possible role of man and God in this story.

Part 1: You are a Paranormal Activity Investigator, and your client has asked you to research the history of the modern State of Israel for evidence of miraculous activity. Choose three examples of events in Israel's history and describe what happened. Then, for each event you have chosen give two sides of the argument – firstly demonstrating God's hand in the miracle, and conversely, how this could be seen as the work of purely human effort. Your final paragraph should be your own conclusions, whether the history of the State of Israel points towards the hand of God, man's ingenuity and effort, or a combination of both.

Here are some examples of events from Israel's history you may wish to research (but there are many others you could present instead):

- The rebirth of Hebrew as a modern language
- The UN Partition Plan vote of 1947
- The War of Independence
- The immigration and absorption of a million refugees in the first decade of Israel's existence
- The Six-Day War
- The settling of the Negev desert and making it bloom
- The rescue of Jewish communities around the world, including Yemen, Iraq, Ethiopia, and Russia
- Israel's economic boom in the last two decades

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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