



# Educator's Guide

(HIGH SCHOOL • AGES 15–18)

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## From Optimism to Hope

### Introduction

Thank you for participating in the inaugural **Rabbi Sacks Global Day of Learning in Schools**. Jewish communities and day schools around the world will be learning some of the Torah of Rabbi Sacks in his memory during the week of his second yahrzeit (the anniversary of his passing) and we are thrilled you will be one of them.

The theme of this year's initiative is *From Optimism to Hope*. It is powerful to know that people of all ages across the world will be exploring the same ideas from Rabbi Sacks, something you may wish to point out to your students.

This is a suggested outline of what you may wish to explore with your students, but feel free to adapt, pick and choose, or learn something completely different. This outline goes hand-in-hand with the main learning resource that communities and adult learning groups around the world will be learning today. Please refer to the source sheet whenever indicated.

### Objectives

- To introduce your students to Rabbi Sacks as a person, a Rabbi, and Jewish leader.
- To encourage them to learn some of his Torah in his memory.
- To explore two approaches to hope:
  - The idea that having hope shows you have faith in Hashem.
  - The difference between optimism and hope.

## A Brief Overview of the Life of Rabbi Sacks (APPROX. 10 MINS)

**Show** this short video about the life of Rabbi Sacks, entitled A Teacher, a Leader, and a Moral Voice: [rabbisacks.org/videos/a-teacher-a-leader-and-a-moral-voice](https://rabbisacks.org/videos/a-teacher-a-leader-and-a-moral-voice)

**Discuss** with your students what they knew about Rabbi Sacks before watching the video and what, if anything, they learned from the video. This would also be an opportunity to share a personal perspective with your students, mentioning the impact Rabbi Sacks has made on your life and your community.

## A Brief Introduction to Communities in Conversation (APPROX. 5 MINS)

**Show** the first 56 seconds of the video ([rabbisacks.org/yahrzeit](https://rabbisacks.org/yahrzeit)) of Gila Sacks, the daughter of Rabbi Sacks, from the launch of *Communities in Conversation* on his first yahrzeit, who explains that Rabbi Sacks was always looking to learn from every person he met, and he would do this through conversation. Today, we will have conversations in our class to learn from each other and to learn together an idea that Rabbi Sacks taught.

**Discuss** how they can learn something from every person (you may wish to share with them the Mishna in [Pirkei Avot \(4:1\)](#) where a wise person is defined as someone who learns from all people) and help them to take in the fact that they can learn from every single one of their classmates using the following questions:

- Can you learn something from every single person?
- What can you learn from your classmates today?
- Why is conversation a good way to learn from other people?

## Biblical Study: Jacob as a Model of Hope (APPROX. 25 MINS)

**Arrange** *chavruta* (study partner) learning of [Bereishit 37](#). Yaakov is told that Yosef has died, and he refuses to be comforted, because deep down he cannot give up the hope that perhaps his son is still alive. You could ask your students to learn the whole chapter, or just the verses found on [page 2 of the source sheet](#).

**Discuss** why Yaakov refused to be comforted. You may find these questions helpful for this:

- Rabbi Sacks teaches that Yaakov “refused to be comforted” after he learned about the death of his son Yosef – what exactly does he mean?
- Why do you think Yaakov refused to be comforted?
- Do you remember how the story ends? Do you think this is connected to Yaakov’s refusal to be comforted? How?

**Learn** (in *chavruta* pairs or as a class) Talmud Bavli Moed Katan 27b and the quote from Rabbi Sacks which follows it on [page 2 of the source sheet](#). Consider these questions:

- Why does Jewish law have a clear framework, including a timeline, for mourning a loved one?
- Did Yaakov ignore these halachic conventions? How can you understand his behaviour?
- How does Rabbi Sacks explain this and what message does he draw from this story?

**Learn** (in *chavruta* pairs or as a class) the sources under the heading “Understanding Jacob’s Response from the *Laws of Guardians (shomerim)*” on [page 3 of the source sheet](#). Consider these questions:

- What important parallel does Rabbi Sacks find between the narrative in Bereishit (37:31–35) and the laws of being a guardian (Shemot 22:10–13)?
- Why did the sons demand that Yaakov “identify” Yosef’s robe?
- According to Rabbi Sacks, Yaakov was forced to admit the evidence suggested that Yosef was dead, but what was really going on in his mind?
- What message does Rabbi Sacks learn from this episode?
- How can we apply this message to our own lives?

## Hashkafic/Philosophical Discussion: Optimism and Hope (APPROX. 25 MINS)

**Show** this short video from Rabbi Sacks: [rabbisacks.info/optimismvshope](https://rabbisacks.info/optimismvshope). (The transcript for this video can be found on [page 1 of the source sheet](#).)

- Is there value in being an optimist? Why is it better to have hope, according to Rabbi Sacks?
- How has hope impacted Jewish history?
- What does Rabbi Sacks mean when he says that “Judaism is the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind”?

**Learn** in groups the texts from Rabbi Sacks on the theme of Optimism vs. Hope. Divide your students into three groups. Give each group one of the following texts:

1. Hope and Covenantal Time ([page 4 of the source sheet](#)).
2. Hope as a Statement of Faith ([page 5 of the source sheet](#)).
3. The Voice of Hope in the Conversation of Humankind ([page 6 of the source sheet](#)).

**Ask** each group to read through their text and discuss the questions that follow the source. Once they have finished learning their sources in groups, they should then present the key idea of the text – and the discussions they had – to the rest of the class.

## Conclusion: Hatikvah (APPROX. 5 MINS)

**Show** this short video from Rabbi Sacks on Israel: [rabbisacks.org/videos/israel-at-70](https://rabbisacks.org/videos/israel-at-70). Use the following questions to have a final discussion on Hope in Jewish history:

- From everything you have learned today about **hope** in the thought of Rabbi Sacks, why do you think it is appropriate that the national anthem for the modern State of Israel is called “Hatikvah” (The Hope)?
- Can you think of any other examples of the impact of hope in Jewish history?
- How can we take the idea of hope as Rabbi Sacks has explained it to us and apply it to our lives today, as individuals and as a nation?

## Next Steps: Project Hope

*An optional project/assignment inspired by this idea:*

You may wish to encourage your students to carry forward what they have learned today. Here are some ideas for activities they can do after the session is over:

- Ask your students to write a letter to themselves or to a particular individual who they feel would benefit from hearing Rabbi Sacks’ message about Hope.
- Challenge your students to describe a specific challenge in their community or the world and then depict what it would look like if people approached that problem with i) Pessimism, ii) Optimism, and iii) Hope. How would the different attitudes impact the outcomes?
- We concluded by asking them how they can apply the idea of hope to their lives. Now invite them to collectively create a practical project to improve the world around them that reflects their hope and determination that things can and will get better. For example, this could be a *chessed* initiative, or an environmental project.