

THE Rabbi Sacks

GLOBAL DAY OF LEARNING IN SCHOOLS



From Optimism to Hope

STUDENT STUDY SHEET

1 • Who was Rabbi Sacks?



Questions to Consider

1. What did you know about Rabbi Sacks before today?
2. What new information do you now know?
3. Do you have any questions about him you would like to know?

2 • Why are we learning in Rabbi Sacks' memory?

Gila Sacks, who is the daughter of Rabbi Sacks, said about her father:

Perhaps the most defining feature of my father's life, one that I don't think I fully appreciated until after he died, was that he learned, and learned, and continued to learn every single day, until his last. He learned from books, from text, from laws. He learned from history and from world events. But, mainly, he learned from people. He would seek out people to learn from, from every possible path of life. And he would seek out what he could learn from everyone he met.

And he would do this through conversation, through talking and listening. So for him, conversation was a defining and spiritual act, a way of opening ourselves up to something beyond ourselves, of being challenged, the only way we could really become more than we were before. A training, perhaps, for opening ourselves up to God.

בן זומא אומר, איזוהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר (תהלים קיט) מכל מלמדי השכלתי כי עדותיך שיחה לי. איזוהו גבור, הכובש את יצרו, שנאמר (משלי טז) טוב ארף אפים מגבור ומשל ברוחו מלכד עיר. איזוהו עשיר, השמח בחלקו, שנאמר (תהלים קכח) יגיע כפיה כי תאכל אשריה וטוב לה. אשריה, בעולם הזה. וטוב לה, לעולם הבא. איזוהו מכבד, המכבד את הבריות, שנאמר (שמואל א ב) כי מכבדי אכבד ובזי יקלו.

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? One who learns from everyone, as it is said, “From all my teachers I gained wisdom.” Who is strong? One who masters his evil impulse, as it is said, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules over his spirit is better than he who conquers a city.” Who is rich? One who rejoices in what he has, as it is said, “When you eat from the labor of your hands, you will be happy and all will be well with you.” “You will be happy” – in this world, “and all will be well with you” – in the World to Come. Who is honored? One who honors others, as it is said, “Those who honor Me, I will honor; but those who scorn Me will be despised.”



Questions to Consider

1. How does Rabbi Sacks embody this Mishna?
2. Do you think you can learn something from every single person?
3. What can you learn from your classmates today?
4. Why is conversation a good way to learn from other people?

3 • How having hope shows you have faith in Hashem

After learning the story of Yaakov when he thought Yosef had died, and he refused to be comforted, because deep down he never gave up hope that maybe Yosef was still alive ([Bereshit 37](#)), consider this quote from Rabbi Sacks:

There are laws in Judaism about the limits of grief – shiva, sheloshim, a year. There is no such thing as a bereavement for which grief is endless. And yet Jacob refuses to be comforted. A Midrash gives a remarkable explanation. “One can be comforted for one who is dead, but not for one who is still living,” it says. In other words, Jacob refused to be comforted because he had not yet given up hope that Joseph was still alive. That, tragically, is the fate of those who have lost members of their family (the parents of soldiers missing in action, for example), but have as yet no proof that they are dead. They cannot go through the normal stages of mourning because they cannot abandon the possibility that the missing person is still capable of being rescued. Their continuing anguish is a form of loyalty; to give up, to mourn, to be reconciled to loss, is a kind of betrayal. In such cases, grief lacks closure. To refuse to be comforted is to refuse to give up hope.

Refusing Comfort, Keeping Hope (Vayeshev), Covenant & Conversation – Genesis: The Book of Beginnings (Maggid 2009), p. 253



Questions to Consider

1. How does Rabbi Sacks explain why Yaakov refused to be comforted?
2. What did Yaakov refuse to give up hope on?
3. How did having hope show Yaakov had faith in Hashem?

4 ■ Conclusion: From Optimism to Hope

Rabbi Sacks on Optimism vs. Hope:

People often confuse optimism and hope. They sound similar. But in fact, they're very different. Optimism is the belief that things are going to get better. Hope is the belief that if we work hard enough together, we can make things better. It needs no courage, just a certain naivety to be an optimist. It needs a great deal of courage to have hope. No Jew, knowing what we do about history and our own past so often written in tears, can be an optimist. But no Jew, who is a true Jew, can ever give up hope. And that is why Judaism is for me the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind. And hope is what transforms the human situation.



Questions to Consider

1. Why is being hopeful better than being an optimist?
2. Where in your life are you an optimist and where do you have hope?
3. Why do you think according to Rabbi Sacks, being a Jew means to have hope?
4. Can you think of examples from Jewish history when Jews showed they had hope?
5. How will you show this week that you have hope?



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