



# Covenant & Conversation

FAMILY  
EDITION

Jonathan Sacks  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

NASO • נָשׂוּךְ

STUDIES IN SPIRITUALITY

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"צט

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

*"I have loved the Torah of R' Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah.*

*An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives." — Rabbi Sacks*

## The Blessing of Love

● This summary is adapted from this week's main essay by Rabbi Sacks, available at [RabbiSacks.org/covenant-conversation/naso/the-blessing-of-love/](https://RabbiSacks.org/covenant-conversation/naso/the-blessing-of-love/)

Naso is the longest of all the *parshiyot*. It is 176 verses long. Yet one of its most moving passages, and the one that has had the greatest impact over the course of history, is very short indeed. It is known by almost every Jew:

May the Lord bless you and protect you;  
May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you;  
May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace. (Num. 6:23–27)

This is among the oldest of all prayer texts. It was first recited by Aharon and his sons, and by the Kohanim in the Temple. And it is still said today by the Kohanim in the reader's repetition of the *Amidah*. In most of the world it is said by Kohanim only on Jewish holy days, and in Israel it is said in shul every day. It is used by parents as they bless their children on Friday nights. It is often said to the bride and groom under the *chupah*. **It is the simplest and most beautiful of all blessings.**

There are over seven billion people now living on this earth. What makes any of us more than a face in the crowd, a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore?

There is a lovely story about a crowd of people who have gathered on a hill by the sea to watch a great ship pass by. A young child is waving enthusiastically. One of the men

in the crowd asks him why. He says, "I am waving so the captain of the ship can see me and wave back."

The man responds, "But the ship is far away, and there is a large crowd of us here. What makes you think that the captain can see you?"

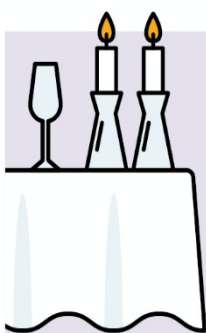
The boy answers, "He will be looking for me among the crowd. The captain of the ship is my father."

This story reflects what we mean when we say, "May the Lord turn His face toward you." **The fact is that we are all God's children. He is our parent. He turns His face toward us. He cares.**

The name we call *Hashem* – the name used in the priestly blessings, and in almost all the priestly texts – is our name for God as He relates to us as individuals, each with our unique combination of hopes and fears, gifts and possibilities. *Hashem* is our God who speaks to us and who listens when we speak to Him. *How* this happens, we do not know, but *that* it happens is central to Jewish faith.

**Faith means believing that God cares about us.**

Believing: I am here because He wants me to be. The soul He gave me is pure. Even though I am like the child on the hill watching the ship pass by, I know that God is looking for me, waving to me as I wave to Him. That is the most profound inner source of peace. We do not need to prove ourselves in order to receive a blessing from God. All we need to know is that His face is turned toward us. **And when we believe this, when we are at peace with ourselves, we can begin to make peace with the world.**



## Around the Shabbat Table

1. Can you feel that God cares for you and sees you?
2. Do we need to "see God" to strengthen this relationship also?
3. What is the connection between God turning His face towards us and our experiencing peace?



# Wearing the Captain's Hat

by Rabbi Chaim Strauchler

Three days before my elder son's bar mitzvah (parshat Naso five years ago, in the year 5778/2018), I was seriously injured in a bicycle accident. I received amazing support from my family, friends, doctors, and community – prayers from around the world – and most importantly a *refuah sheleimah* from Hashem.

During my recovery, I picked up an unexpected call. Rabbi Sacks was on the line. He was calling to check on how I was doing. He wanted to give me his blessing. The call was short. The heavens did not suddenly break open with blinding light. Yet, I still felt like the boy on the seashore waving at the boat. The captain had seen me.

Rabbi Sacks' essay this week relates to our faith in God, "We matter as individuals because God cares for us as a parent for a child." The vehicle through which we experience that blessing is human – the Kohanim stand up and bless the community. As Rabbi Sacks demonstrated, we can each be that priest or captain in the lives of those around us – by noticing them and sharing kind words and blessings with them.

Last month, the US Surgeon General set out plans to combat a health crisis named Loneliness. It's not an easy feeling to overcome. But when we feel God's face turned toward us, we know that we are not alone. And when people connect to us, we are not alone. When we don the captain's hat and reach out with a loving wave, we too are not alone.

● Rabbi Chaim Strauchler serves as the community Rabbi at Congregation Rinat Yisrael in Teaneck, New Jersey.



## A CLOSER LOOK

● Rabbi Strauchler reflects on some of the deeper lessons he learnt from Rabbi Sacks.

### How can we implement Rabbi Sacks' message on blessings into our own lives?

We are people of faith. Our faith is here for us in hard times. Our faith is not an obligation but a blessing. Rabbi Sacks wrote, "to be blessed is to know that we are loved by the One vaster than the universe who nonetheless turns His face toward us as a parent to a beloved child."

We can nourish that blessing of faith by speaking to that One and speaking about that One. We can allow that blessing to flow through us by opening our eyes and connecting positively with others. An email, phone call or text is often all that is required to make or strengthen a connection.

### What influence did Rabbi Sacks have on your approach to being a Rabbi?

There are many ideas I learnt from Rabbi Sacks, not just from his wonderful writings, but also from his behaviour and the small things he did that made a big impact. Apart from when he was speaking in the House of Lords, Rabbi Sacks would begin his address to every audience with the word, "Friends." His bright yellow ties were meant to brighten the lives of those with whom he interacted. They symbolised for me a new way to be a Rabbi. Rabbi Sacks turned his countenance towards others.

As a Rabbi, I try – like Rabbi Sacks did – to see "persons, individuals, each with unique configuration of hopes and fears, gifts and possibilities" and to help them feel both valued and loved.



## TORAH TRIVIA

**Q1:** For which positive mitzvah that is performed in the *beit kneset (shul)* may one be permitted to interrupt their recitation of the Amidah?

**Q2:** According to the Ashkenazi custom in shuls outside of Israel, why is Birkat Kohanim (the priestly blessing) only said in the Musaf service of Yom Tovim, whereas in Israel it is a blessing given every day?

(Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 128:47).

filled with additional simcha from being in the Jewish homeland, so the blessing can be given daily. Yom Tov meal. In contrast, in Eretz Yisrael one is enjoying the simcha of Yom Tov and the impending Musaf service, when a person begins to feel close to Tov, the Birkat Kohanim only happens during the from being filled with love and joy. Even on Yom over work and other financial matters prevent us experienced on Yom Tov. On all other days, worries (love and joy), and these emotions can only be fully must be given in the spirit of *ahava* and *simcha*

**A2:** The Ramah explains that the priestly blessing the only kohen in shul at that time. the Amidah reaches this part of the service and he is the community, if the Chazzan leading the repetition of prayer to give the priestly blessing to the

**A1:** A kohen may interrupt their silent Amidah

● Adapted from Torah IQ by David Woolf, a collection of 1500 Torah riddles, available worldwide on Amazon.