



# Covenant & Conversation

FAMILY EDITION

Jonathan Sacks  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

MIKKETZ • מִקֶּטֶז

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

## Sibling Rivalry

● This summary is adapted from a video by Rabbi Sacks, available at [www.RabbiSacks.org/covenant-conversation/mikketz/sibling-rivalry/](http://www.RabbiSacks.org/covenant-conversation/mikketz/sibling-rivalry/)

This week's Torah portion recounts how Yosef, despised by his older brothers and sold into slavery by them, eventually becomes a powerful Egyptian ruler. When his brothers later visit Egypt they fail to recognise him, although Yosef immediately recognises them.

This story is not just a simple narrative of envy and reconciliation. Rather, as Rabbi Sacks explains, it's one of sibling rivalry – the root of all conflicts in Sefer Bereishit. Other examples include Kayin and Hevel, Yitzchak and Yishmael, and Yaakov and Eisav. In these stories, the younger sibling represents the present-day Jewish condition – diminutive, misunderstood, resented, but ultimately resilient.

**Yosef's story has clear parallels with the history of the Jewish people.** Judaism, the first monotheism, was followed by Christianity and Islam, both claiming descent from Avraham. This relationship can also be seen as a sibling rivalry. Throughout history there have been periods of harmony, like in early medieval Spain, but also many times of extreme conflict, such as during the blood libels, expulsions of Jews, and the Holocaust.

The establishment of the State of Israel has been the destination of the Jewish journey since the days of Avraham, and the homeland of the Jewish people since the days of Yehoshua. No nation on earth, with the possible exception of the Chinese people, has had such a long association with a land. Yet Israel has faced existential threats from its neighbours, who deny its right to exist. From the day the State of Israel was declared in 1948 until today, Israel has been under threat of attack. This conflict is not a mere border

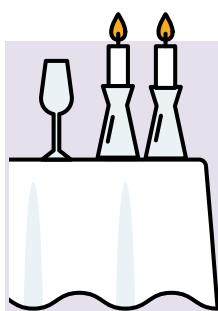
dispute; it's a fundamental denial of Israel's legitimacy by groups like Hamas, Hizbollah, and the government of Iran.

**Israel's struggle for recognition and peace is not just a local issue but a global concern. No other nation in the UN has its existence questioned like Israel. And while we as Jews argue among ourselves as to this policy or that, we must not distract focus from the larger issue of Israel's existence in the first place.**

The resolution to this conflict lies not in policy debates but in a fundamental shift in recognition and acceptance. **The story of Yosef and his brothers serves as a metaphor for this journey – a journey towards mutual recognition and peace.** Yosef's brothers did not recognise Yosef, and until they did, there was no repair. So too, the nations of the world must end their fratricidal stances towards Israel and pursue peace and reconciliation. Until Israel's fundamental right to exist is accepted, there can be no peace, merely a series of staging posts on the way to a war that will not end until there is no Jewish State at all.

Rabbi Sacks' crucial point is that the Jewish community – both within Israel and the diaspora – should focus on the bigger picture. We may disagree about Israeli politics, and internal debates are valid, but right now we need to focus our energy on ensuring the survival and recognition of Israel.

**The story of Yosef is a reminder of the resilience and eventual triumph of the Jewish spirit, a narrative that continues to unfold in the modern context of Israel's existence and its quest for peace and recognition.**



## Around the Shabbat Table

1. What other impactful examples of sibling rivalry can you think of in Tanach?
2. Think of a time when you were not recognised or acknowledged for who you truly are. How did that make you feel, and what was the outcome?
3. What do you believe are some key steps towards achieving lasting peace and mutual recognition among differing nations and cultures?

## Parsha in Passing

Paroh, king of Egypt, experiences two disturbing dreams. First he dreams of seven fat and seven lean cows, and then of seven full and seven withered ears of corn. Disturbed and confused, he looks for interpreters. The royal butler finally remembers that Yosef (who he met in prison) has this gift.

Yosef is brought to stand before the king and given a chance to use his talents. He listens to Paroh's dreams carefully, and credits God with his ability to interpret.

Then Yosef predicts that there will be seven years of prosperity followed by seven of famine,

and advises Paroh to begin storing grain now, while there is food aplenty. Paroh is deeply impressed by Yosef's smarts. He even appoints him as Egypt's new governor. Yosef then marries and has two sons, Menashe and Ephraim.

Seven years later, when the predicted famine strikes, Yosef's brothers, except for the youngest, Binyamin, head to Egypt to buy food. Yosef recognises them, but they don't recognise him. So Yosef accuses them of being spies, detains Shimon, and demands that they bring Binyamin back on a subsequent trip. Yehuda vows

to protect him if he joins and reluctantly Yaakov agrees, so the brothers all head back to Egypt.

On their second visit, Yosef - his identity still hidden - treats them kindly, releases Shimon, and hosts a dinner for them. As one final test, Yosef secretly places a silver goblet in Binyamin's sack as the brothers are preparing to leave.

Soon after they depart, Yosef's men stop them and accuse them of theft. Yosef then proposes to free the brothers except Binyamin, who he will keep as his slave. The parsha ends here on a cliffhanger, waiting to see how the brothers respond. Have they changed? Or will they betray another of Yaakov's favourite sons?

## Parsha People

**Yosef:** Still dreaming, and this time dreaming up plans to keep a land safe from famine.

**Yosef's older brothers:** They came from far away, and even now, in close proximity, the gap is still massive.

**Binyamin:** Formerly the youngest and most loved of the remaining brothers. Currently a stealer of cups. Apparently.

**Paroh:** Fat cows, skinny cows, fat corn, skinny corn. What do you think about at night?



## Parsha Philosophy

Rabbi Sacks understood the importance of unity among siblings, and how they must stand together to face wider conflicts.

He notes that all of the conflicts we have seen in Bereishit, and perhaps in general, can be traced back to

sibling rivalry. This includes not only tensions between Jews, but even conflicts between the Jewish people and Israel with other nations. Ultimately, neither small-scale tiffs nor global conflicts can be solved peaceably without the

ability for us to recognise, respect, and understand one another.

What does effective conflict resolution look like? In your opinion, what are some strategies for reconciling differences and achieving better recognition in the face of harsh and difficult disagreements?

## Parsha Playoff

Let's play "Guess Who".

In this game, one player thinks of a person everyone knows (it could be someone from the family, a famous figure, or a character from Jewish history or stories).

The other players may only ask yes/no questions, in their efforts to guess who it is. Go around the group, taking turns to ask questions. Every 'no' passes the turn to the next player.

Who will be first to recognise the mystery character?

## Parsha Puzzle

Q. Which phrase in this week's parsha contains 6 words in a row that all begin with the same letter?

▼ The letter is Aleph, and the phrase is 'ish el achiv aval asheimim anachnu' (Bereishit 42:21) meaning, 'They said to one another, 'We are guilty, because of what we did to our brother.'

Adapted from *Torah IQ* by David Woolf, a collection of 1,500 Torah riddles, available from Amazon.



# Parsha Practical

There are so many practical applications for ‘rivalling’ sibling rivalry through recognition. Much of this manifests in the form of including others, learning about each other’s differences, and developing relationships based on common interests.

But practically speaking, there’s a deeper application of this idea, and that is learning to recognise yourself and learning to reconcile

your own inner conflicts. This includes understanding your own individual strengths and weaknesses, affirming your boundaries with others, and being able to reflect on your own personal growth.

Indeed, it’s likely Yosef had to engage in this type of exercise to maintain his identity and faith in Egypt, stranded in a foreign culture and religion.

Last week Yosef was a passive character who dreamed but did not act. It was the people around him who caused change to happen. But you may have noticed that Yosef undergoes a transformation this week.

Can you pinpoint Yosef’s strengths, and when he came to recognise them? What do you see as your own inner strengths?



# Parsha Parable

## The A to Z of Love

Once upon a time, in a quiet village, there were two brothers - Ari and Zeke. As they grew older, they inherited their father’s beautiful farmland. Of course, they divided it equally, and each worked his own plot.

As time went on, Ari got married and had six children. And often he went out to farm his land and thought about his younger brother Zeke, who had no wife and no children. He knew he was blessed to have his own family, and worried about his brother living all alone.

On the other side of the farm, Zeke would farm his section of the land and think about his big brother, who had a lot a people to look after, and had to work very hard. “We shouldn’t have an equal plot,” he thought. “Ari’s family is so



much larger than mine, and I don’t have any extra mouths to feed. His plot should be bigger. He needs more!”

One night, moved by this concern, Zeke secretly took a large bag of wheat and carried it across the fields to his brother’s store-house, thinking, “This will surely help my big brother, and his family.”

That same night, Ari was worrying about his brother’s future. He also got out of bed. Then he packed up a large bag of wheat and carried it to

his younger brother’s store-room. “Perhaps this can comfort him in his solitude,” Ari thought.

The next morning, to their surprise, each brother found his own supply of wheat unchanged despite his sneakiness the night before!

This mysterious occurrence happened again the next night! Then, on the third night, Ari and Zeke went back and forth, back and forth, many times with bags of wheat. Then all of a sudden, the two men bumped right into each other on top of a hill, each carrying wheat for the other.

Dawn was breaking and in the light of the new day they recognised each other and finally realised what had been happening. Without a word the brothers embraced, their hearts filled with love and appreciation. They understood that in giving and caring for each other, they had received a far greater gift.

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