



# Covenant & Conversation

FAMILY  
EDITION

Jonathan Sacks  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

HA'AZINU • האזינו

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 Inheritance that Belongs to Everyone

● This summary is adapted from the video and essay available at [RabbiSacks.org/covenant-conversation/haazinu/the-inheritance-that-belongs-to-everyone/](https://RabbiSacks.org/covenant-conversation/haazinu/the-inheritance-that-belongs-to-everyone/)

There's a Midrash about Rabbi Yannai, who once invited an elegantly dressed man to his home, only to discover he knew nothing of the Torah. When challenged to recite a single *passuk*, the guest instead demanded his share of the Torah, arguing that it belongs to everyone, not just to scholars. Rabbi Yannai, a Torah scholar, looked down at the guest with contempt. But the stranger, with great dignity, said to him: **"The Torah is my inheritance too. Since you have much, and I have none, please share a little of what you have with me. Don't dismiss me. Teach me."**

Few ideas in the history of Judaism have greater power than this: the idea that Torah knowledge belongs to everyone, that everyone should have the chance to learn, that education should be universal, that everyone should be, if possible, literate in the laws, the history and the faith of Judaism; that **education is the highest form of dignity, and it should be accessible to all.**

This idea goes so far back and is so deeply embedded in Judaism that we can easily forget how radical it is. Knowledge is power, so those who have it are sometimes reluctant to share it with others. Most societies in history have had literate elites. As the only ones who could read, they maintained power. To this day, many professions use a technical vocabulary intelligible only to insiders, so their knowledge is impenetrable to outsiders. Judaism is different. Indeed, the birth of Judaism happened at roughly the same time as the birth of the alphabet.

Mesopotamia had the world's two earliest forms of writing, cuneiform and hieroglyphics. But these systems – pictograms, ideograms, and syllabaries in which symbols stood for whole words or syllables – involved too many signs to be taught to everyone. The alphabet, with its mere 22 symbols, opened up the possibility of a society of universal literacy for the very first time.

Judaism bears the mark of this throughout, starting with Avraham who was chosen to teach. **"For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after**

**him to keep the way of the Lord."** (Bereishit 18:19)

Moshe, too, spoke of education. Sefer Devarim is essentially a massive adult education experience of the Master Prophet taking the whole people as his disciples and teaching them both the law (the commands, statutes, and judgments) and – no less importantly – the history that lies behind it.

This rises to a climax at the end of the book in the form of the "song" of Ha'azinu, this week's Parsha, which is preceded and followed by these words:

**"Moshe recited the words of this song from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel."**

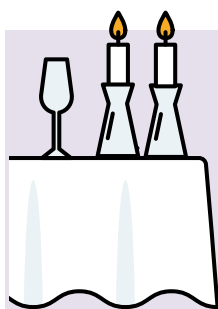
**"This is the blessing that Moshe, the man of God, pronounced for Bnei Yisrael before his death . . . Moshe commanded us the Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Yaacov."** (Devarim 31-33)

Notice the importance of these words. Moshe is speaking to **everyone**. The second passage contains the phrase quoted by Rabbi Yannai's guest, that **the Torah belongs to everyone**. It is not the possession of the learned, the elect, the elite, or the specially gifted. Not of a class or caste. It is the inheritance of the entire congregation of Yaacov.

Only in relatively modern times did this idea of universal education spread beyond Judaism. It did not exist even in England, then the premier world power, until the Education Act of 1870. It has taken the Internet revolution – Google, smartphones and the rest – to make it a reality worldwide. Even today, some 70 million children are still deprived of education in countries like Somalia, Eritrea, Haiti, Comoros, and Ethiopia.

Education is the key to human dignity. It should be equally available to all. This is one of the most profound ideas in all of history, and it was born in the powerful words immediately following this week's Parsha:

**"Moshe commanded us the Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Yaacov."**



## Around the Shabbat Table

1. How has education impacted your life?
2. What are some barriers to education today, and how can they be addressed to ensure that everyone has access to learning?
3. If you could have one character from Tanach be your modern-day teacher, who would you want to learn from?

# Parsha in Passing

Ha'azinu features a poetic song delivered by Moshe on his final day on earth.

He calls upon heaven and earth as witnesses and urges Bnei Yisrael to remember their history, and how God found them, made them His

people, and brought them out of slavery and granted them a rich land. Moshe warns of the dangers of complacency, as the people might grow overconfident and abandon God, leading to severe consequences, including God

“hiding His face.” However, God will ultimately reconcile with His people.

The song of Ha'azinu ends with God instructing Moshe to climb to the top of the mountain of Har Nevo, to take in the view of the Promised Land from afar.

## Parsha Principles

**Teaching Torah:** Teach your children, make it clear, so Torah's words they'll always hold dear.

**God's Hidden Face:** When God hides His face, it's time to retrace: do what you can to return to His embrace.

**Warnings of Complacency:** Some people stopped learning, and they lost their way - don't let complacency lead you astray.

**Moshe's Final View:** Moshe climbed Har Nevo up high, to view the Promised Land... and say goodbye.



## Parsha Practical

Let's elaborate on education just a bit further: Our responsibility as Jews is to ensure that Torah and Jewish knowledge is passed down through all the generations.

Today, we can fulfil this mitzvah by dedicating time to study the Torah and teach others - our children, family members, or

community members. This can be done through family study sessions, joining or leading a Torah class, sharing insights and discussions about Jewish teachings (and reading this Family Edition, of course).

By making Torah study a regular part of our lives and encouraging

others to learn, we continue the tradition of universal education and ensure the Torah remains an active, living inheritance for all.

- What is your favourite Jewish topic to study?
- What is Jewish idea or story that you love sharing with - or teaching to - others?

## Parsha Playoff

Let's play **Pass the Torah story, and fast!** Players must name as many Torah stories as they can relate to a chosen theme, such as kindness, courage, or faith, within a set time or until no one can think of another story. Each player takes turns adding a new story but if they can't think of one, they are out for that round. The last person standing at the end of each round wins and picks the next theme.

An example of a round could be “kindness,” in which players might mention Avraham welcoming guests, Rachel helping Eliezer and the camels, or the instructions to leave gleanings for the poor.

## Parsha Puzzle

Q. The song of Ha'azinu (Devarim 32:1-42) is written in the Torah scroll as two columns with a blank space in between. Can you name the three other sections of Tanach are written in the same special way?

▲ 1) The Shirah of Yehoshua (12:9-24)  
2) The sons of Haman listed in Megillat Esther (9:7-9)  
3) The list that follows the introductory passage in Megillat Kohelet of “to everything there is a time...” (3:2-8)

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



# Parsha Philosophy

It's a core belief that everyone should have access to knowledge and education, not just a select few.

For the Jewish people, the Torah is the ultimate form of learning and inheritance, a principle that began with Moshe, who taught all of Israel, not just a particular

group. This idea that everyone deserves a chance to learn has been revolutionary throughout history.

Even today, many places limit education, but Judaism teaches that education is a key to dignity and should be available to everyone.

By ensuring that education is accessible to all, we uphold a timeless principle that values each person's dignity and potential, reflecting the true spirit of Judaism's commitment to universal learning.

- How will you help the youngest generation connect to the Torah and feel empowered to learn from it?



# Parsha Parable

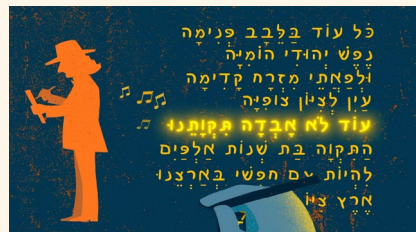
## The Tale of Hatikvah

In the late 1800s, in a small village in Eastern Europe, a Jewish poet named Naftali Herz Imber felt a deep yearning shared by all Jewish people. Scattered across many lands and facing hardship, they held fast to a single, enduring hope: the dream of returning to their ancient homeland, the land of Zion (or what we call Israel).

Naftali poured his heart into a poem he called "Tikvatenu" ("Our Hope"). With words filled with longing, he wrote of a people exiled for nearly two thousand years who had never abandoned their dream of redemption. Their hope was like an eternal flame, burning bright through centuries of wandering and struggle.

As the poem spread through Jewish communities, it was set to a melody - a simple, haunting tune adapted from a Romanian folk song by Samuel Cohen. The melody was easy to learn and hard

to forget. Soon, "Hatikvah" ("The Hope") was being sung in Jewish gatherings, whispered in dark corners of ghettos, and carried on the lips of pioneers setting sail for the Land of Israel.



From Eastern Europe to Yemen, from the crowded streets of New York to the rural villages of Morocco, "Hatikvah" resonated with Jews of every background. It became a song everyone knew, whether they were a learned scholar or a humble shopkeeper. For all who sang it, the song was more than just music - it was an inheritance, passed down like a treasured heirloom from generation to generation.

As the Zionist movement strengthened, "Hatikvah" was sung at the first Zionist Congress

in 1897. It became the unofficial anthem of Jewish hope and the dream of a national home. Then the song travelled further, gaining momentum and uniting Jews in their common aspiration for freedom and a return to their ancestral land.

In 1948, when the State of Israel was born, "Hatikvah" was sung with joy and tears by those who had lived to see the dream fulfilled. Though it wasn't officially recognised as the national anthem until 2004, it had long been the melody that captured the soul of a people.

To this day, "Hatikvah" is more than just a song. It is a living testament to a people's shared memory and hope - a reminder that some things are meant to be shared by all. Like the Torah, it belongs to every Jew, wherever they may be, reminding them of their connection to each other, and to the land they have never forgotten.

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The Rabbi Sacks Legacy perpetuates the timeless and universal wisdom of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks as a teacher of Torah, a leader of leaders, and a moral voice.

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