



Covenant & Conversation



Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

VAYECHI • 'N'I

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"צז

COVENANT & CONVERSATION SUMMARY

The Last Tears

There are seven cases of Yosef's tears due to his family encounters in Egypt. Firstly, when the brothers came before him in Egypt, Yosef recognised them, turned away from them, and began to weep. Second, when the brothers returned to Egypt with Binyamin, Yosef hurried out and looked for a private place to weep. Third, after Yehuda's impassioned speech, Yosef was ready to reveal his true identity, but he wept so loudly that the Egyptians outside heard him.

Fourth, after he had told his brothers the truth, he threw his arms around his brother Binyamin and wept, and Binyamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Fifth, Yaakov arrived in Egypt, and Yosef finally met his father again after their long separation. Sixth, at the death of his father, Yosef threw himself on Yaakov and wept over him and kissed him. Seventh, soon after this the brothers came before Yosef and said, "Our father asks you to forgive your brothers. He left this message before he died." And Joseph wept.

No one in Tanach weeps as much as Yosef. His tears fall for many reasons. But the most intriguing are the last, the tears he sheds when he hears that his brothers fear that he will take revenge on them now that their father is no longer alive.

Rav Lichtenstein suggests that these final tears express the price Yosef pays when his dreams come true and he achieves power. Yosef has done everything he could for his brothers. He has sustained them at a time of famine. He has given them not just refuge but a place of honour in Egyptian society. And he has made it as clear as he can that he does not hold a grudge against them for what they did to him all those many years before. Yet still, all these years later, his brothers still do not trust him and fear that he may wish them harm. Rav Lichtenstein explains that "at this moment, Yosef discovers

the limits of raw power. He discovers the extent to which the human connection, the personal connection, the family connection, hold far more value and importance than power does – both for the person himself and for all those around him." Yosef "weeps over the weakness inherent in power, over the terrible price that he has paid for it." His childhood dreams have come true, but there is tragedy too, and the family wounds remain open.

On the surface, Yosef holds all the power, and even his family are entirely dependent on him. But he still yearns for their acceptance, their recognition, their closeness. And ultimately he has to depend on them to bring his bones up from Egypt when the time comes for redemption and return.

The early history of humanity was marked by a struggle for power in which some became masters, and others became slaves. This tension creates a conflict worked out through history. There will only be equilibrium when there are neither masters nor slaves,

but merely human beings who treat one another not as means to an end but as ends in themselves. With this insight, Yosef's last tears

are a prelude to the master-slave drama about to be enacted in the book of Shemot. Rav Lichtenstein's profound insight into the text reminds us of the extent to which Tanach - and Judaism - is a sustained critique of power. Until the age of Mashiach, we cannot do without it. But power alienates. It breeds suspicion and distrust. It diminishes those it is used against, and thus diminishes those who use it.

Power may be a necessary evil, but it is an evil, and the less we have need of it, the better. Even "Yosef HaTzaddik" weeps when he sees the extent to which power sets him apart from his brothers. **Judaism is about an alternative social order which depends not on power but on love, loyalty and the mutual responsibility created by covenant.**

● The full essay written by Rabbi Sacks is available [on our website](#).

In a Nutshell

Yaakov spends his final years in Egypt. Before his death, he asks Yosef to promise to bury him in Canaan. Yaakov blesses Menashe and Ephraim, granting them the status of his own children and future tribal leaders. Yaakov blesses each son with a unique destiny: Yehuda will produce kings, Levi will serve as *kohanim*, Yissachar will be scholars, and other tribes will fulfil different roles. Yaakov is buried in the Ma'arat Hamachpelah, and Yosef requests his own bones be returned to the Holy Land when he dies, reminding everyone of God's promise to bring them back to the land.

Around the Shabbat Table

1. How do you think families can rebuild trust when it has been broken?
2. Can you think of any other Torah stories that critique the misuse of power?
3. How does the brit between God and the Jewish people rely on love and loyalty instead of power?





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ON THE PARSHA • WRITTEN BY SARA LAMM

INSPIRED BY THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"צז



Delving Deeper

Rabbi Sacks highlights the moments when Yosef weeps, exploring the tension between power and human connection. Through seven moments of emotional crying, Yosef’s story highlights the cost of his rise to authority and his unfulfilled desire for reconciliation with his brothers.

Despite his kindness and forgiveness, their ongoing mistrust shows that power alone cannot repair broken relationships. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein suggests that Yosef’s tears reflect the isolation that often comes with power and just how important family is - despite a

rise to fame. Ultimately, Judaism has a vision of a society built on love, loyalty, and shared responsibility - not domination.

While power can sometimes be necessary, it creates distance and fosters distrust. Judaism offers a different path: relationships are strengthened through respect and care rather than control. And that is something we should *always* be emotionally connected to.

• Can you think of a time in your own life when becoming powerful made you lose sight of your values? How did you regain control over your core beliefs?



Parsha Activity

Trust Falls

Pair up family members. One person stands with their back to their partner and falls backwards, while the partner catches them. For younger children or those unsure about falling, they can stand closer to their partner, and the fall can be smaller or more controlled. Use a soft mat or mattress for added safety. After each turn, partners switch roles. The game can be repeated with different pairings to strengthen trust and teamwork among all participants.



Family Farming

Lior and Ronit were brother and sister, but also the best of friends. Growing up on a farm surrounded by only vast fields and barnyard animals, they spent a lot of time together, and they depended on one another for company, support, and so much more.

Things changed as they grew older and their aspirations started to diverge. Lior dreamed of expanding the farm, adding modern machinery and new crops. Ronit, however, loved the simple life and worried about the risks of growing the farm and changing things too fast. Despite their differences, they worked side by side, each believing the other would support their vision.

One winter, Lior took out a large loan to buy expensive new equipment. Unfortunately, the machinery broke down, leaving the farm in debt.

Lior, too ashamed to tell Ronit, kept the news to himself, and tried to fix things on his own. When Ronit eventually discovered the truth, she was furious. “Why didn’t you trust me enough to share this?” she asked, hurt and angry. Their argument lasted for months, and they didn’t speak.

Then one day, Ronit found Lior sitting by the barn, lost in thought. “I was angry, not just at you, but at myself too,” she said. Lior reached out a hand and said, “And I should



have trusted you. You’re my family.”

Together, they realised that their bond was more important than any disagreement. They worked side by side, rebuilding the farm and their relationship, learning that forgiveness was the path to healing.

• How do you think Ronit and Lior can strike a balance in the future where they can support each other’s dreams for their farm?



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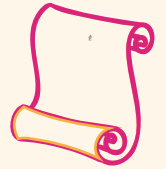
Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

ON THE HAFTARA • WRITTEN BY RABBI BARRY KLEINBERG

INSPIRED BY THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"צז

INTRODUCTION

AN INTRODUCTION TO ASARAH B'TEVET Haftara Reading



On Friday this week, we will be commemorating some tragic events in Jewish history by fasting on Asarah b'Tevet (the 10th of Tevet). Three notable events that occurred on this day are:

- 1) The siege of Jerusalem by Nevuchadnezzar.
- 2) The translation of the Torah into Greek in 246 BCE.
- 3) The death of Ezra HaSofer (the scribe) in 313 BCE.

The Haftara read at Mincha time is the Haftara read on all 'minor' fast

days. After a brief overview of this special Haftara we will explore the Haftara for this week's Parsha.

Rabbi Sacks wrote **"I think that is really the lesson of Asarah b'Tevet. Antisemitism has clearly returned to the Jewish world, particularly to Europe and to America, and Jews feel it deeply.**

Asarah b'Tevet represents this feeling of being under siege. But the way to react is not to, as it were, submit to the cultural imperatives of the larger society

and simply try to disappear. This doesn't work. The truer response is the Ezra response, to strengthen ourselves spiritually.

Because as Zechariah said, in the Haftara of Chanukah, *Lo b'chayil v'lo bakoach, ki im b'ruchi.* 'The Jewish people survive not by strength or by power' – though those are certainly necessary – 'but by My Spirit' says the Lord.' (Zechariah 4:6)"

SUMMARY

THE FAST DAY'S HAFTARAH in a Nutshell



Haftara for the fast of Asarah b'Tevet – Isaiah 55:6-56:8

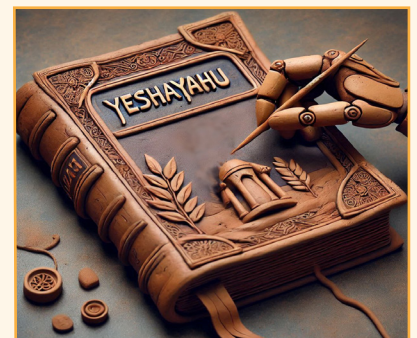
In Chapter 55, Isaiah calls on the people to seek God while He is near, and urges them to repent and turn away from wickedness, for God's ways and thoughts are higher than human understanding. "For My plans are not your plans, nor are My ways, your ways" (Isaiah 55:8).

God promises that His word will accomplish its purpose, bringing renewal like rain to the earth. The passage emphasises God's mercy and the joy that comes from following Him.

Chapter 56 extends this invitation to all people, including foreigners and eunuchs, who were traditionally excluded. God welcomes anyone who upholds His covenant and keeps Shabbat, promising them a place in His house better than sons and daughters.

God also declares that His house will be "a house of prayer for all nations," (Isaiah 56:7) emphasising inclusivity and the gathering of the outcasts of Israel, thus showcasing His expansive compassion and

commitment to justice to all of humanity.





The Haftara in a Nutshell

I Kings 2:1-12

In the Haftara for Vayechi, King David (David Hamelech) is nearing the end of his life, and he must make preparations for a plan of succession. So he gives final instructions to his son Solomon (Shlomo), who is destined to succeed him as king.

David urges Solomon to be



strong, to follow God's ways, and to obey His commandments. He reminds his son of God's promise that 'If your descendants are scrupulous in their conduct, and walk before Me faithfully, with all their heart and soul, your line on the throne of Israel shall never end!' And so to ensure that David's lineage remains on the throne of Israel, and all will be well, he must follow the righteous path.

David also advises Solomon on how to deal with certain individuals: he instructs him to deal wisely with Yoav, who had shed innocent blood, and Shimi, who had cursed David.

However, he also tells Solomon to show kindness to the sons of Barzillai, who were loyal to David.



Points to Ponder

1. Why do you think that strangers living in the land of Israel need to keep Shabbat?
2. King David's advice to his son includes Torah advice and politics. Which other leader receives multiple pieces of encouragement when he takes charge?

(Clue: He follows Moshe as leader)

After giving all these instructions, David dies and is buried in the City of David. Solomon then firmly establishes himself as the new king of Israel.

- Of all David's children, why do you think Shlomo was the one chosen to be the next king of Israel?



Parsha and Haftara Links

Both the Parsha and Haftara include the final words of a parent to a son on his deathbed. Yaakov uses this time to give guidance and bless each of his twelve sons, and King David does the same for his son, Solomon.

In fact, an almost identical phrase is used at the beginning of the Parsha and Haftara. Bereishit 47:29 states: "The days of Yisrael [Yaakov] drew near to die." Whilst the beginning of the Haftara, I Kings 2:1 tells us: "The days of David drew near to die."

There is even more than a linguistic connection: David's testament to Shlomo on the eve of his death corresponds to Yaakov's testament to his sons on the eve of his death. Both include favourable

and less favourable consequences for different people: Yaakov foretells of the rewards for Yehuda and Yosef for their good actions, and David speaks of the reward that will come to the sons of Barzilai the Gileadite.

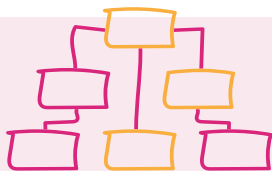
The Haftara closes with the death of David and the number of years of his reign, just as the Parsha details Yaakov's death and the years of his life.

Rabbi Sacks shared Rashi's comment that "Yaakov wished to reveal what would happen in the future, but the Divine Presence was removed from him." He tried to foresee the future but found he could not. Similarly, the Talmud tells an intriguing story about King David, who asked God to tell him



how long he would live. God refused to tell him when he would die, and revealed only that he would die on a Shabbat.

- Why do you think both these leaders of dynasties asked God about the future, just as their lives were ending?



On the **Book of Kings**

As Rabbi Sacks quotes from the book of Kings, “Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt... From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.” (1 Kings 5:10-14)

Rabbi Sacks then gives examples of other great statesmen who spent their time learning. “**Gladstone, four times Prime Minister of Britain, had a library of 32, 000 books. We know – because he made a note in his diary every time he finished reading a book – that he read 22, 000 of them. Assuming he did so over the course of eighty years (he lived to be 88), this meant that he read on average 275 books a year, or more than five each week for a lifetime... Ben Gurion was a voracious reader as well as a prolific author. Benjamin Disraeli was a best-selling novelist before he entered politics. Winston Churchill wrote almost 50 books and won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Reading and writing are what separate the statesman from the mere politician.**”



Further Ponderings

How would you summarise your life so far? What are the key events, both positive and negative, that made you who you are today?



Quote of the Week

“Leaders learn. They read. They study. They take time to familiarise themselves with the world of ideas. Only thus do they gain the perspective to be able to see further and clearer than others...”

Learning and Leadership, Shoftim, Covenant & Conversation

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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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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