



Covenant & Conversation



Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

BEHA'ALOTECHA • בהעלותך

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

COVENANT & CONVERSATION SUMMARY

Is a Leader a Nursing Father?

It was the emotional low-point of Moshe's life. After the drama at Sinai, the historic giving of the Torah, the Golden Calf, the smashing of the Ten Commandments, God's forgiveness, the building of the Mishkan, and the highly-detailed codes of purity and holiness given to Bnai Yisrael, all the people can think about is food. They complain, yet again. And Moshe cannot take it anymore. He tells God that the burden of leading is too heavy and even asks to die rather than continue suffering. He says to God:

"Why have You treated Your servant so badly? Why have I found so little favour in Your sight that You lay all the burden of this people upon me? Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who gave birth to them all, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your lap, as a nursemaid carries a baby?... I cannot bear all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me.... kill me now, if I have found favour in Your sight, and let me not see my own misery!"

(Bamidbar 11:11-15)

Let us examine the specific way that Moshe describes leadership within this speech. He says, *"Why do You tell me to carry them like a nursemaid carries a baby?"* But God has never told Moshe to lead in that way. God gave him instructions, but never said he had to carry the people like a parent.

The man who gave Moshe his first tutorial in leadership was his father-in-law, Yitro, who warned him that trying to do everything alone was not good. He told Moshe to share the load with others by appointing leaders to help. Right after Yitro leaves, Moshe breaks down – just like later, when his sister Miriam dies, and he loses his temper and hits the rock. We can surmise from this that - behind the scenes - Yitro and Miriam gave Moshe emotional support, perhaps more than we first realised. Leaders need support too; they can't lead alone.

The bigger issue is how Moshe saw his role. He thought he had to do it all, like a parent who must do everything for a young child. But if we treat people like children, they stay dependent. **They don't learn to take responsibility.** That's what happened when Moshe was far away, atop Har Sinai. The people panicked and made the Golden Calf - they didn't know how to handle things on their own.

God then tells Moshe to choose seventy elders to help him lead. This was a big change. It meant leadership needn't rest on one person alone. One of the main lessons is that real leadership is about creating more leaders, not more followers.

There's a problem in Jewish history called the "Great Man" theory – the idea that one strong, charismatic person can solve everyone's problems. People believed this when they asked the prophet Shmuel for a king. But the kings often failed: Shaul lacked strength, David sinned, Shlomo was led astray, and the kingdom broke apart.

Later, during the Second Temple, the Maccabees fought bravely, but their descendants became corrupt. Even Rabbi Akiva made this mistake, promoting Bar Kochba as the next heroic "Great Man", but his rebellion ended in disaster for the Jewish people.

Judaism teaches something different: that leadership should be shared. Every person matters. Everyone should be educated, responsible, and part of the team.

Good leaders don't try to do everything or gain all the power. They guide, empower, and inspire others to step up. That's why God said to Moshe, "I will take some of the spirit that is on you and place it upon them." Great leaders share their spirit. They don't treat people like children, but help them become adults who can lead too. **People become what their leader gives them the space to become. When that space is large, they grow into greatness.**

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

In a Nutshell

Aharon is told to kindle the Menorah lamp, and the Leviim begin their service in the Mishkan. When a group unable to bring the Korban Pesach in time for Seder night - due to ritual impurity, ask - "Why should we miss out?" God introduces a "Pesach Sheini" for those delayed. After nearly a year at Har Sinai, Bnai Yisrael begin to journey through the desert. The people complain about the manna and demand meat, prompting Moshe to appoint 70 elders to help carry the weight of leadership. Miriam speaks against Moshe and is struck with leprosy; Moshe prays for her, and the people wait for her to heal before moving on.



Around the Shabbat Table

1. How does it feel when someone gives you space to take responsibility?
2. Who are your soulmates in your own leadership?
3. Compare and contrast other leaders in Tanach to Moshe: Who was similar to him in style? Who carried their leadership differently?



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ON THE PARSHA • WRITTEN BY SARA LAMM

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



Delving Deeper

This week, Bnei Yisrael complain loudly - but it's by no means the first time they have done this. When Moshe breaks down under the weight of leading the people, it's not merely exhaustion - it's a misunderstanding of what leadership really means.

As we have seen from the metaphor he uses, Moshe sees himself as a parent who must carry the people like helpless children. But that kind of leadership leaves followers dependent and stunted. God gently shows him a better way: to share the load, to trust others, and to raise more leaders. Seventy new leaders are appointed, and the burden on Moshe lessens.

Rabbi Sacks adds that **"Judaism is about diffused responsibility, making each individual count, building cohesive teams on the basis of a shared vision, educating people to their full potential... That is... how the pioneers built the land and State of Israel in modern times."**

True leadership isn't about doing everything yourself - it's about helping others grow, giving them confidence, and creating a team that can carry the mission forward together.

- How do we know when it's time to step back and let someone else take the lead?



Parsha Activity

Light as a Feather

Moshe couldn't carry the people alone, and neither can you! In this teamwork challenge, choose a light household object and work together to move it across the room. The twist: Each person may only use one body part (like a finger, knee, or elbow). No hands! Try different items or add new constraints, like silence!

What made it easier: strength, creativity, or teamwork? Who helped the most, and how?



Aviva's Advocate

Aviva didn't plan on becoming a school teacher. A quiet student growing up in Netanya, she was bright and observant, but rarely noticed by others. She wasn't exactly ignored, but you could say she was underestimated or overlooked.

Then, during her fifth year at school, her class met Morah Miriam. Here was a teacher who didn't lead by raising her voice or demanding attention. Morah Miriam gave quiet encouragement, listened carefully, and assigned classroom responsibilities with purpose.

She noticed every student, saw their strengths and their struggles, and showed that she cared for each and every one of them.

One day, Aviva was beckoned

to the teacher's desk. "I have a feeling that you're someone others will turn to - maybe not now, but soon. Want to try being in charge of something? How about the morning announcements?" her teacher asked.

Aviva was surprised by the opportunity, but she agreed to step up. It was the first time anyone had seen her as a leader. Not a helper. A leader. But it was by no means the last time this would happen. Years later, Aviva became a teacher herself. She kept a sticky-note on her desk that read, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader." It reminded her that leadership was passed on in tone, in warmth, in how she responded to



interruptions or uncertainty.

Eventually, Aviva became the head teacher of a growing school in the Negev. Parents praised her. Teachers trusted her. Students - especially the shy ones - felt seen. Forty years passed. At her retirement ceremony, someone asked what leadership or management training had shaped her the most. She smiled. "Once upon a time, my fifth-grade teacher gave me a microphone and stood back to let me lead."

How does the story of Aviva relate to the leadership style of Moshe?



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ON THE HAFTARAH • WRITTEN BY RABBI BARRY KLEINBERG

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

HAFTARAH SUMMARY



The Haftarah in a Nutshell

Zechariah 2:14-4:7 (Ashkenazim and Sephardim)

Zechariah 2:14-4:9 (Yemenites)

The Haftarah contains prophetic visions of hope, restoration, and Divine support for post-exilic Israel. God calls on Zion to rejoice because He will dwell among His people, and many nations will join themselves to the Lord. The prophet then sees Joshua the high priest being accused by Satan, but God rebukes Satan and cleanses Joshua, symbolising the removal of Israel's guilt. Joshua is given clean garments and promised a role in the messianic future if he remains faithful.

Zechariah sees a vision of the Menorah with two olive trees, symbolising God's continual presence and support. The message is clear:

Zerubavel, the governor rebuilding the Temple, will succeed "not with valour, and not with strength, but with My Spirit," says the Lord. The passage emphasises Divine grace, purification, and the restoration of Israel's leadership.

Telling the story of Chanukah, Rabbi Sacks quotes a verse from this week's Haftarah and explains: "**It was one of the most stunning military achievements of the ancient world. It was, as we say in our prayers, a victory of the few over the many, the weak over the strong. It's summed up in a wonderful line from the prophet Zechariah: "Not by might**



Point to Ponder

Can you think of any other miraculous Jewish battles in Tanach or throughout Jewish history?



nor by strength, but by My Spirit" says the Lord.' The Maccabees had neither might nor strength, neither weapons nor numbers. But they had a double portion of the Jewish spirit that longs for freedom and is prepared to fight for it."

TANACH CONNECTIONS



Parsha and Haftarah Links

Our Parsha contains many different themes, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to connect a part of the books of Nach (the prophets) to all of them. Therefore, the Haftarah this week focuses on the first subject



of the Parsha, namely the Menorah.

The Parsha begins with the requirements for the lighting of the Menorah. The Haftarah details the vision of Zechariah which centres around the Menorah and the interpretation given to Zechariah by the angel who spoke to him.

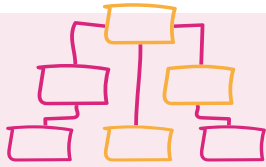
Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein notes that if this is the only connection between the Parsha and Haftarah then it only deals with a very small part of each text. He argues that there is a much broader connection:

"The world of sin and exile that followed the revelation at Mount Sinai and the expectation to enter

the land of Israel, imperils the people with a danger similar to that which will fall upon them following the destruction of the Temple.

"The Torah does not deal with this problem explicitly, but the midrashim allude to it, and it is certainly possible to read it between the lines.

The reading of the Haftarah from Zechariah, with its message about rebuilding in the aftermath of a severe fall, and the rehabilitation of the people through the spiritual leadership of a priest and a political leader, fill the needs bubbling beneath the surface of our Parsha."



On the Book of Zechariah

The prophet Zechariah was a post-exilic prophet who was active in the late 6th century BCE during the early Persian period. He was a contemporary of the prophet Haggai and played a key role in encouraging the Jewish people to rebuild the Second Temple in Jerusalem after returning from Babylonian exile. Zechariah was likely from a priestly family. He is referred to as the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo.

His prophetic journey began around 520 BCE, during the reign of King Darius of Persia. (This Darius should not be confused with the son of Queen Esther and King Achashverosh - that's Darius the Mede!) The Book of Zechariah is part of the Twelve Minor Prophets, and includes visions, symbolic imagery, and messianic prophecies. Zechariah emphasised repentance, justice, and hope, portraying God's enduring commitment to Israel's renewal and ultimate salvation.

Rabbi Sacks often referred to the **“two interlinked prophecies of Uriah – who foresaw the day when Jerusalem would be ruined – and Zechariah – who saw the day it would be rebuilt.”**

“For almost 2,000 years,” he wrote, **“Jews had waited for that moment, and ours was the generation that lived to see Jerusalem reunited and rebuilt. We saw the realisation of Zechariah’s prophecy 24 centuries ago.”**



Further Ponderings

If you had a great idea about how to improve the world, how would you go about spreading your message?



Quote of the Week

“Never believe that a handful of dedicated people can’t change the world. Inspired by faith, they can. The Maccabees did then. So can we today.”

www.rabbisacks.org/videos/chanukah-inspired-by-faith-we-can-change-the-world/

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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.

Explore the digital archive, containing much of Rabbi Sacks' writings, broadcasts, and speeches, or support the Legacy's work, at www.RabbiSacks.org, and follow The Rabbi Sacks Legacy on social media @RabbiSacks.

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