



Covenant & Conversation



Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

LECH LECHA · לך לך

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ל"צ ז

Our Children Walk on Ahead

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

The call to Avraham, with which Lech Lecha begins, seems to come from nowhere: God calls to Avraham saying: *"Leave your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, and go to a land which I will show you."*

Nothing prepares us for this radical departure. We have none of the description of Avraham's character that we had with Noach, no glimpses of childhood as with Moshe. Avraham's call feels like a sudden break with all that went before. Adding to the mystery is Joshua's later statement:

"Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the river, Terach, the father of Avraham and Nachor; and they served other gods."

The implication is that Avraham's father was an idolater. Hence the Midrash where a young Avraham smashes all his father's idols. When accused, he answers, "The largest of the idols took a stick and broke the rest." Terach protests that idols have no ability to do this, to which Avraham replies, "Let your ears hear what your mouth is saying" (Bereishit Rabbah 38:8). His point being, why worship idols if they are merely clay, unable to do anything? In this story we see Avraham as an iconoclast, rebelling against his father's faith, breaking things apart to find the truth.

Rambam offered another picture. He taught that humanity began with belief in one God, but gradually came to worship nature and its forces. Only Avraham, reasoning on his own, broke through the error: *"He continued to speculate until he achieved the way of truth... He knew there is one God who created everything, and besides whom there is no other."*

In both Rambam's interpretation and the Midrash above, Avraham represents discontinuity: a radical break with the past. Yet the previous chapter seems to tell a different story:

"Terach took Avram... and they went forth together from Ur... to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there" (Bereishit 11:31). Here Avraham continues a journey that his father Terach had already begun.

How to reconcile these accounts? Some commentators

suggest that Avraham heard the call first, inspired Terach to begin the journey, and that the Torah rearranges events to avoid the appearance that Avraham abandoned his father. But another possibility is that Avraham's spiritual insight did not come from nowhere. Terach had taken the first steps; Avraham completed them. **Children complete what their parents begin.**

This pattern is deeply Jewish. Noach *"walked with God."* Avraham later said, *"The God before whom I have walked"* (Bereishit. 24:40). God told him, *"Walk ahead of Me"* (Bereishit. 17:1). God shows the way, then challenges His children to move forward.

A famous Talmudic story (Bava Metzia 59b) tells how the Sages outvoted Rabbi Eliezer even when a Heavenly Voice called out to say that Eliezer was right. Later on, when asked how God reacted when the rabbis stood firm in their decision, Eliyahu answered: *"He smiled and said, 'My children have defeated Me! My children have defeated Me!'"*

To be a parent in Judaism is to make space for children to grow - even God does this. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik explained that God deliberately left creation incomplete *"to adorn man with the crown of creator and maker."*

Halachah reflects this too. Though children must honour parents, Rambam rules that a father should not impose too heavy a burden. He should forgive and close his eyes, for a parent may forgo his honour (Hilchot Mamrim 6:8).

The story of Avraham can thus be read in two ways: as a break from his father's world of idolatry, or as the continuation of a journey Terach had begun but could not finish. Perhaps childhood itself holds this same ambiguity. As we grow up, we often feel we are charting a path entirely our own. Yet later we discover how much of that path reflects the values of our parents. **And it began with God Himself, who left - and continues to leave - space for us, His children, to walk on ahead.**

Around the Shabbat Table



1. What does it take to leave something familiar behind for something unknown?
2. What is the difference between courage and rebellion?
3. They didn't always agree with each other, but what lessons do you think Avraham learned from Terach?

A Takeaway Thought

Every child's journey is both a continuation of the journey that came before, and a departure to forge a new path. In faith and in family, we honour our parents by carrying their dreams forward beyond what they could ever achieve.



Exploring the Parsha

WITH SARA LAMM

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



The Parsha in a Nutshell

Hashem calls to Avram: "Leave your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you." Trusting completely in Hashem's promise, Avram sets out with his wife, Sarai and his nephew Lot towards the Land of Canaan.

Upon arrival Avram builds a *mizbeach*, calls out in the name of Hashem, and spreads the word that there is only one true God.

When a famine strikes, Avram travels down to Mitzrayim to find food. Fearing the Egyptians would kill him to take his beautiful wife, he asks Sarai to say she is his sister. She is taken to the palace, but Hashem strikes Paroh and his household with

plagues and Sarai is set free.

Back in Canaan, Avram and Lot's herdsmen fight, and the two decide to part ways. Lot chooses to settle in Sodom, a city filled with evil. When four kings capture Sodom and take Lot hostage, Avram and his men defeat the invaders, and rescue Lot. Malki-Tzedek, the king of Shalem, blesses him. Hashem then establishes a *brit bein ha-betarim* - the covenant of the pieces, promising Avram's descendants, the Land of Israel, as well as many years in Exile. Years later, Hashem renames them Avraham and Sarah, and gives them the mitzva of *brit milah*: Avraham obeys at once, sealing the eternal covenant.



Parsha Activity

Echo and Grow

Sitting in a circle, one player makes a short sound, like a clap, a hum, a whistle, or a word. The next player repeats the first sound, then adds one new sound of their own. Each person continues the chain, repeating everything that came before and adding one more sound. Players must listen carefully and remember the order as the pattern grows. If someone forgets a sound, the group repeats it together until everyone is back on track. You can make it faster, quieter, or louder as it continues, turning it into a rhythm, chant, or melody.



Fit for a King

From the days of the desert, Bnei Yisrael had carried the Mishkan, the portable home they built for Hashem, setting it up whenever they travelled until they reached Canaan. But it had been many years since they had needed to transport the two Tablets containing the Ten Commandments, and King David longed to build a permanent house for Hashem. He envisioned the Beit Hamikdash, a place where Aron could rest and the people could come close to God.

And so David Hamelech gathered gold, silver, and cedar wood from Lebanon, organised the Leviim, and planned every detail. But ultimately, Hashem told King David that this task would not be his. David had fought

many wars and shed much blood. The Beit Hamikdash was destined to be built not by a man of battle, but by a man of peace.

David did not argue. Instead, he prepared everything for his son, Shlomo - the materials, the design, the people, and the vision. He understood that even if he did not finish the task, he could make it possible for the next generation to begin.

When Shlomo became king, he continued his father's work. He followed David's plans, but also shaped them with his own wisdom and sense of beauty. It took seven years, and contributions from all the people, but he built the Beit Hamikdash and dedicated it with a



prayer that all who turned toward it, would be heard by God.

The Beit Hamikdash became the meeting point between father and son, between one generation's dream and the next's fulfilment. David began; Shlomo completed. Together, they remind us that each generation walks further on the path of those before them, building not only for themselves, but for the future.



Cards & Conversation

Our **Cards & Conversation** packs include one card for every parsha. On one side, you'll find an interesting question from the Torah to think about and discuss. Flip it over, and you'll discover an idea from Rabbi Sacks that shines a new light on the parsha.

Hashem said to Avram, "Go forth ... to the land that I will show you." (Bereishit 12:1)

QUESTION:

Avraham and Sarah begin a journey without knowing where they're going. Would you ever do the same?

Rabbi Sacks on Bereishit 12:1 (in the Koren Sacks Humash) offers an answer:

"To be a Jew is to be willing to hear the still, small voice of eternity urging us to travel, move, go on ahead, continuing Avraham's journey toward that unknown destination at the far horizon of hope."

"The miracles of Medinat Yisrael continue to astound and inspire us. Jews continue to make aliyah, and that aliyah will continue, b'ezrat Hashem, for many years and many decades to come." ("Ask Rabbi Sacks: Part 3")

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Parsha in Practice

Mitzva of the Week

"...every male among you shall be circumcised... this shall be the sign of the brit between Me and you." (Bereishit 9:6).

Hashem commands Avraham to mark their covenant through Brit Milah, the sign of belonging to Him. This mitzva is to then be observed for all parents of Jewish boys when they reach eight days.

Rabbi Sacks explains that this mitzva reminds us to live with holiness, respect, and moral responsibility. It teaches that our relationships both with God and with others must be guided by dignity, not desire; by commitment, not convenience. It is a physical reminder of a moral truth.

Practically Speaking What will you keep?

Today, in addition to the physical Brit Milah that eight-day old boys receive, we can all live this covenant with God by honouring the sacredness of our connections.

When we keep our promises, treat others with care, and see every person as created in God's image, we are upholding the covenant and living with integrity. This mitzva is a reminder to choose faithfulness and respect in all relationships.

"God created physical nature... But He asks us to be co-creators with Him of human nature. The symbol of that co-creation is the eighth day; the day He helps us begin to create a world of light and love."

– Rabbi Sacks



Try it out

YOUNG STUDENTS:

Think of a promise you've made to a friend, a sibling, or Hashem. How can you show today that you're keeping your word?

ADVANCING STUDENTS:

What does keeping a promise mean to you? How does it feel when the promise is broken?

Think about one relationship that truly matters, whether it's with a friend, a family member, or with God. Take a few moments to reflect on what keeps that bond strong: honesty, trust, patience, or care. As you go through your day, notice small ways to nurture that connection.



Learning in Layers

Guiding you through Torah step by step, with insights from the [Koren Sacks Humash](#) with translation and commentary by Rabbi Sacks. Each step takes us a little deeper and invites 'Torah as Conversation,' just as Rabbi Sacks taught.



"Do not be afraid..." (Bereishit 15:1)

LAYER 1: LOOK AT THE TORAH TEXT

"הָיָה דְבַר-ה' אֶל-אַבְרָם, בְּמַחְזָה, לֵאמֹר: אֶל-תִּירָא אַבְרָם, אֲנִכִּי מִגֹּן לָךְ-שָׂכָרְךָ, הִרְבֵּה מְאֹד."

LAYER 2: READ RABBI SACKS' TRANSLATION

"... the word of the Lord came to Avram in a vision, saying: 'Do not be afraid, Avram. I am your Shield. Your reward shall be very great.'"

LAYER 3: THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS

After a dangerous battle, during which time Avram bravely rescues Lot, Hashem appears to him. He reassures him, saying He will protect him and reward him.

What do you think it means for God to be someone's shield?

Where have you seen the phrase "Magen Avraham"?

LAYER 4: LEARN FROM RABBI SACKS' COMMENTARY

"Each year we tell the story of Abraham's call from God to leave his home and travel to "the land that I will show you." I call that the *journey into insecurity*. Life has been highly insecure for Jews for four thousand years. We are still on that journey. A lot of people are struck by the history of Jewish suffering. I am always struck by the history of Jewish recovery from suffering. What gives a people the strength to keep going? It is that feeling that you can face the future without fear if you know you are not alone... That, I think, is the positive reason for faith in the twenty-first century. We can handle anything so long as we have the humility to know that we are answerable to something much greater than ourselves."

Rabbi Sacks sees this moment between God and Abraham as a key moment about humility and faith. If we have the humility to appreciate God is always there behind the scenes, for each of our blessings and successes, we can also then find the strength to face our sufferings and recover, knowing always that God is there to support us during the good times and the difficult days.

LAYER 5: REFLECT AND RESPOND

Add your own questions and apply what you've learned to other examples in the Torah, and in your own life!

1. How does believing you are not alone change the way you act?
2. Why do you think Hashem spoke to Avram right after the battle? Why might God's promise of protection only come after Avram has already shown courage?

- Find out more about the [Koren Sacks Humash](#) at rabbisacks.org/books/the-koren-sacks-humash

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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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