



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

Moshe's Challenge

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

It was the worst crisis in Moshe's life. Bnei Yisrael complained about the food in the desert: *"If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost - also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna."*

This was by no means their first complaint. Earlier, after crossing the Red Sea, the people had complained about water, food, and hardship. But this time Moshe reacted differently: *"I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me... put me to death right now."*

Our questions are: why did this complaint break him? And why did God respond by telling him to appoint seventy elders? Moshe already had a team of leaders. On Yitro's advice, he had appointed many officials at Sinai. And these new elders certainly could not solve the practical problem of finding meat.

Furthermore, why did God say, *"I will take of the spirit that is on you and put the spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone."*

To understand this, we must notice the difference between Sefer Shemot and Sefer Bamidbar. The earlier complaints came before Sinai. The people were still newly freed slaves, frightened and uncertain. But after Sinai everything should have changed. The people had heard God's voice, and built the Mishkan. But almost immediately after leaving Har Sinai, they reverted to the same complaints as before.

That was Moshe's crisis. If the revelation at Sinai and the building of the Mishkan had not changed the people, what would? For the first time, Moshe felt his mission had failed, and feared that nothing could lift the nation from focusing on food and discomfort, instead of wanting spiritual growth.

This despair can happen even to great leaders. Eliyahu,

Yirmiyahu, and Yonah also prayed to die. Even the greatest leaders can have their moments of despair, wondering whether all their efforts are making any difference at all.

God's response to Moshe was extraordinary. **He let Moshe see the influence he had on others.** God placed Moshe's spirit upon the seventy elders, and they all received the prophetic vision. When Moshe saw that his vision had entered other people, and that he had disciples, he realised that he had made a true and lasting impact.

That changed everything. Immediately afterwards, Moshe became calm and confident again. When Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp and Yehoshua feared they threatened Moshe's authority, Moshe replied: *"If only all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His spirit on them."*

Later on, when Aharon and Miriam criticised their brother, Moshe's pride was not hurt, and he even prayed for Miriam when she was punished.

Moshe did not know that thousands of years later people would still study his words and live by the Torah he taught. He only needed to know that he had changed some people, and that his work would continue through them.

That message matters to all of us. Often we never realise how deeply our words or actions affect others. A kind deed, encouragement, or act of support may stay with someone for years, even if we never hear about it.

God showed Moshe, for one moment, the hidden impact of his life. But if it was enough for Moshe, it is enough for us. The good we do lives after us. It is the greatest thing that does. We may leave a legacy of wealth, power, even fame, but these are questionable benefits. **What we leave to others is a trace of our influence for good. We may never see it, but it is there. That is the greatest blessing of leadership. It alone is the antidote to despair, the solid ground of hope.**

Around the Shabbat Table



1. Why is it easier to complain about what we lack than to appreciate what we have?
2. Consider the experience of the other prophets in Tanach. Did they have similar challenges to Moshe, or different ones?
3. How would you apply the messages of this essay to your own life?

A Takeaway Thought

Hope comes from knowing that our efforts are never wasted. And true leadership means trusting that even when change seems impossible, our influence for good lives on through others.



Exploring the Parsha

WITH SARA LAMM

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7" 57

THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION



The Parsha in a Nutshell

Parshat Beha'alotecha covers a wide range of events as Bnai Yisrael prepare to finally leave Har Sinai. It begins with the command to Aharon to light the Menorah in the Mishkan, followed by the purification of the Leviim for their sacred service. The Torah describes the "Second Passover" or Pesach Sheni, offering a second chance to those who were unable to bring the original offering.

The camp then begins its journey, guided by a cloud by day and fire by night, moving at God's command. However, the journey quickly

deteriorates. The people complain bitterly about the manna and demand meat. Moshe, overwhelmed by the burden of leadership, experiences a profound crisis of despair and prays to die.

In response, God tells Moshe to gather seventy elders, upon whom He places some of Moshe's spirit to help bear the burden. The parsha concludes with Miriam and Aharon speaking against Moshe, resulting in Miriam being stricken with *tzaraat*, and Moshe praying for her healing.



Parsha Activity

Pass the Positivity

Have everyone sit in a circle. One person starts by whispering a positive, uplifting message into the ear of the person next to them. That person must then whisper the same message to the next person, and so on around the circle. Once it has gone all around the circle, recite the message in unison, and then applaud as loudly as you can, all together.

Once the message reaches the end, discuss how one person's positive spirit can easily spread to an entire group.

A STORY FOR THE AGES



You Are Special

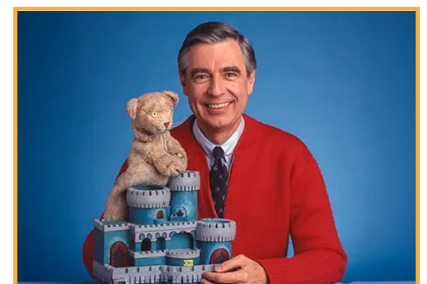
For decades, Fred Rogers (better known as "Mr Rogers"), walked onto a television set, put on his cardigan, and spoke quietly, directly into the camera, so that his captive audience - children around the United States of America, felt like he was speaking directly to each of them.

Mr Rogers told children that they were special exactly as they were, and he taught them how to manage their feelings. The show was filmed on a closed set in Pittsburgh, without a live audience. Fred Rogers felt that a quiet, distraction-free environment allowed him to focus entirely on the individual child watching on television. He strove to keep an intimate, one-on-one connection with the viewers at home.

But this meant that Mr Rogers was unable to see the millions of children he was speaking to. He had no way of knowing how his gentle words were taking root.

In 1969, public television faced a massive crisis. The government was planning to cut twenty million dollars in funding, which would have ended his programme. Rogers went to Washington D.C. to testify before the Senate. The chairman of the committee, Senator John Pastore, was known as a tough, impatient man who had already made up his mind to cut the budget.

Mr Rogers did not argue or shout. He simply looked at the senator and explained what he tried to do for children. He recited the words of a song



he had written to help children understand their anger.

As Mr Rogers spoke, the tough senator's face completely softened. "I'm supposed to be a pretty tough guy," Pastore said, visibly moved. "And this is the first time I've had goosebumps for the last two days. Looks like you just earned the twenty million dollars." In that moment, Fred Rogers got to see what he usually could not. He saw his own spirit, his own message of empathy and care, enter the heart of someone else.



Cards & Conversation

“When you raise up the lamps, the seven lamps shall light the space in front of the candelabrum.”

- Bamidbar 8:2

QUESTION: Aharon the Kohen is commanded to light the Menorah. This is the first act of the daily service, done before any sacrifices or offerings. Before the Magen David, the Menorah was the symbol of the Jewish people. Why do you think that was – and what does it say about what defines us?

Rabbi Sacks' commentary explains: “In the hindsight of history, military victory is often secondary to cultural victory of handing your values on to the next generation, and making sure your children, and theirs, light up the world. The service of God first requires light. This is reflected in the ritual of the Menorah here, remembered in the shul (in the ner tamid, the everlasting light) and celebrated on Chanukah in the growing light of the chanukiah.”

Cards & Conversation: Chumash Edition - Each card holds an interesting question to think about and discuss, based on the Torah portion. Flip it over to discover an idea from Rabbi Sacks that shines a new light on the parsha. Find out more by visiting rabbisacks.org/cards-and-conversation



Parsha in Practice

Mitzva of the Week

Hakarat Hatov

While not a formal mitzva, the concept of Hakarat Hatov is central to this week's parsha. The crisis at Kivrot Hata'avah stems from a total lack of gratitude. Despite being freed from slavery and fed miraculously with manna from heaven, they focus entirely on what they lacked, complaining about the food and romanticising their time in Egypt.

True gratitude requires us to actively notice and appreciate the good in our lives, rather than allowing temporary discomforts to blind us to the miracles we experience every single day.

“Every day we begin our morning prayers with a litany of thanks: that we are here, with a world to live in, family and friends to love and be loved by, about to start a day full of possibilities, in which, by acts of loving kindness, we allow God's presence to flow through us into the lives of others.” - Rabbi Sacks

Practically Speaking

What does a leader need?

God's response to Moshe's crisis is brilliant: He shows Moshe that his spirit has successfully transferred to seventy elders. Now Moshe sees that efforts, his teachings, his influence has made an impact on the people.

The ultimate cure for despair is continuity. It is knowing the values you stand for have been absorbed by others and will outlive you. How can you ensure your best values are passed on?



Try it out

YOUNG STUDENTS:

Imagine planting a tiny seed in soil. For a long time, you water it every day, but you cannot see any growth. It can be frustrating, and you might even want to give up. But underneath the soil, roots are growing. Doing good deeds is exactly like planting those seeds. You might not see the results right away, but your kindness is always taking root in the people around you. Keep planting.

ADVANCING STUDENTS:

We rarely know the true impact we have on others. This week, think of a teacher, mentor, or friend who positively influenced your life years ago. Take ten minutes to write them a short note or send them a message. Let them know exactly how their words or actions helped shape you. Giving someone a glimpse of their own impact is one of the greatest gifts you can offer.



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.



Pesach Sheini

LAYER 1: FIND THE TORAH TEXT: BAMIDBAR 9:6

"וְלֹא-יָכְלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת-הַפֶּסַח, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא."

LAYER 2: READ RABBI SACKS' TRANSLATION

"...and they were unable to offer the Passover sacrifice on that day."

LAYER 3: THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS

The very first time the Jewish people tried to observe Pesach after leaving Egypt, some people were unable to participate. Rather than simply excluding them, the Torah creates Pesach Sheini, a second chance. What does it tell us about God that He builds a second chance directly into the law?

LAYER 4: LEARN FROM RABBI SACKS' COMMENTARY

"My favourite sentence in the English language is Winston Churchill's definition of success: 'Going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.' The real difference is not between failure and success. The real difference is between failing and giving up and failing and keeping on going, missing the mark and recalculating the route. Because even the Torah acknowledges this, we know that in the inner reaches of our soul we can be honest with ourselves, we can acknowledge the ways in which we've fallen short. Those who cannot offer the Passover sacrifice, whether due to lack of planning or to circumstances beyond their control, are eager for another chance. They know that, in His forgiveness, God gives us the strength to heal what we have harmed, to try again, and to become the person He wants us to be."

LAYER 5: REFLECT AND RESPOND

Pesach Sheini teaches that in Judaism, missing an opportunity is never the end of the story. God does not expect perfection - He wants honesty, effort, and the willingness to try again.

1. Is there an aspect of your own life where you feel you have "missed the mark"? What would it look like to recalculate the route?
2. Why do you think it matters that the Torah itself acknowledges human failure, rather than simply asking for compliance?
3. How does the idea of a second chance change the way you think about your relationship with God?

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



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.

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