



# Covenant & Conversation



Jonathan Sacks  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

PINCHAS · פִּינְחָס

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"87

## On Parents and Teachers

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

Just beneath the surface of this week's parsha is an exceptionally poignant story. It occurs in the context of Moshe's prayer to God, asking Him to appoint a new leader of the Jewish people as his future replacement.

God then tells Moshe: "After you have seen, you also will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aharon was." Rashi notes the seemingly superfluous word "also" and says that this hints to us that "Moshe desired to die as Aharon had died."

What does Rashi mean? In what sense was Moshe envious of his brother? The Ktav Sofer gives what is surely the correct interpretation: Aharon had the privilege of knowing that his children would follow in his footsteps. Elazar, his son, was appointed High Priest in his lifetime. According to Ktav Sofer, Moshe longed to see one of his own sons, Gershom or Eliezer, take his place as leader of the people. It was not to be.

Rashi understood this also from another clue. After the daughters of Tzelophehad ask to inherit their father's share in the Land, Moshe thinks: "The time has come that I should make a request of my own - that my sons should inherit my position." God replies: "This is not what I have decided. Yehoshua deserves reward for serving you and never leaving your tent." Moshe's prayer was not granted.

What deeper message does this communicate? Moshe and Aharon represent two great roles in Jewish continuity: *horim* and *morim* - parents and teachers. A parent hands on the Jewish heritage to their children; a teacher hands it to their students. Aharon was the archetypal parent; Moshe the great example of a teacher. Aharon was succeeded by his son; Moshe by his disciple, Yehoshua.

The Sages stressed that Torah leadership does not pass

automatically from parent to child. If Torah leadership were dynastic, Judaism would become a society of privilege and hierarchy. To this, the Sages were utterly opposed. Everyone has a share in Torah. It is the shared inheritance of every Jew.

Rambam expresses this powerfully. Israel was crowned with three crowns: Torah, priesthood, and kingship. Priesthood belongs to Aharon's descendants. Kingship belonged to David's line. But the crown of Torah is different: it belongs to all Israel. Whoever desires it can attain it.

This is one of Judaism's great egalitarian ideas. A society of equal dignity is one in which knowledge - especially Torah, knowledge of how to live - is available equally to all. That is why Jewish communities were built around schools, sustained so that no child would be excluded.

The Sages also created a strong connection between home and school, parent and teacher. A teacher is like a parent; a parent is also a teacher. Education is a conversation across the generations.

Moshe was denied the chance to see his children inherit his role so that his disappointment would become a source of hope to future generations. Torah leadership is not the privilege of an elite. It is open to each of us, if we truly seek it and give it our best efforts of energy and time.

But Moshe was also given a great consolation. Just as, to this day, Kohanim are the sons of Aharon, so are all who study Torah the disciples of Moshe.

**Some are given the privilege of being a parent; others, the privilege of being a teacher. Both are ways in which something of us lives on into the future.** Parent-as-teacher, teacher-as-parent: these are Judaism's greatest roles, one immortalised in Aharon, the other made eternal in Moshe.

## Around the Shabbat Table



1. How does Moses' disappointment offer hope to us today?
2. What is your greatest achievement so far, and how did you earn it?
3. What is unique about the way we educate in Judaism?

## A Takeaway Thought

Torah leadership is earned through learning, and we can each become a link in Judaism's future through study, learning from others and handing on those teachings.



# Exploring the Parsha

WITH SARA LAMM

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7" ז ת



## The Parsha in a Nutshell

Parshat Pinchas opens with God rewarding Pinchas for his bravery in stopping the plague that swept through Bnei Yisrael. Pinchas receives a Brit Shalom, and an eternal priesthood.

The Torah then records a new census of Bnei Yisrael, counting the generation that will finally enter the Land of Israel. Five sisters, the daughters of Tzelophechad, step forward to ask for their father's share of the land, and God rules in their favour, establishing new laws of

inheritance for women.

As Moshe nears the end of his life, he asks God to appoint his successor, so that the people will not be left without a leader when they move ahead without him. God chooses Yehoshua, Moshe's student, and Moshe publicly lays his hands on him, passing his authority to the next generation. The parsha concludes with a detailed calendar of the daily, Shabbat, and festival offerings in the Mishkan.



## Parsha Activity

### Teach it in Two Minutes

Give each person two minutes to teach the rest of the group something they know: a fact about the parsha, a skill, a joke, a word in another language, anything. After everyone has had a turn, discuss: what does it feel like to be the teacher rather than the student? What is something you wish someone had taught you?



## The Learning Curve

Mrs Bergin told her students she loved them all equally. At the time she meant it. But it wasn't really true. There was one student who stood out. His name was Cal Stein. From the start of the school year, she had found him to be a difficult student, a boy who showed no interest in learning. His clothes were grubby, frayed at the edges, and he usually looked down at his shoes, not up at his teachers. Mrs Bergin found it hard to make any connection to him at all. But then everything changed.

When reviewing her students' records one night, she read Cal's file. His year three teacher wrote that Cal was bright, cheerful, and a joy to teach. In later reports, though, she noted that he was struggling because his mother was ill, and unlikely to recover. Then the worst happened. His mother died. Since then, Cal had disengaged from school entirely.

When Mrs Bergin read the reports,

she decided to show Cal extra attention, and extra love. He needed her more! So she gave him extra encouragement, and soon saw that he responded well when she could point out specific things he did well, and when she gave him some extra responsibility.

Through observing Cal carefully, Mrs Bergin completely shifted her teaching style, in all subjects and to all students. She stopped simply teaching subjects and began truly teaching children. All the students received individualised praise and support, but she certainly gave Cal special care and encouragement. Slowly, he was coming alive - working harder, learning faster, and regaining confidence. By the end of the school year, he had become one of the most engaged students in class.

Years later, Mrs Bergin received a letter from Cal. He was writing to tell her she was the best teacher he had

ever had. More letters followed: when he was in college, then medical training, until eventually, a letter arrived signed: Dr Caleb J Stein. He had fulfilled his dream of becoming a doctor, ready to heal others and hoping to find the cure for the disease that had taken his mother from him. Cal invited Mrs Bergin to his wedding, and during his speech, he thanked her for believing in him.

Through tears, Mrs Bergin replied, "You taught me how to teach." They could both look out at the future now. With their new perspective, they could see that they were each making a true impact on the world.





# Cards & Conversation

**"This is the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai." – Bamidbar 28:6**

The Torah introduces the regular daily offerings.

**QUESTION:** What shapes our lives, the extraordinary moments, or the everyday habits and routines?

*Rabbi Sacks' commentary explains:* "In many faiths, a sense of holiness and spirituality belongs to moments that are rare, unusual, exceptional. In Judaism what is holy is the texture of everyday life itself. It is the religious drama of daily deeds, words and relationships. God is not distant but in the here and now – if we create space in our hearts for His presence. We encounter Him, as the journey through the desert ends, not in thunder and lightning of Sinai but every morning and evening in ritual and routine."

*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](http://rabbisacks.org/cards-and-conversation)*



## Parsha in Practice

### Mitzva of the Week

#### Your Laws of Inheritance

When Moshe realised his life was almost at its end, he hoped his sons would inherit his position. But God said no. Leadership in Judaism is not a dynasty.

Parshat Pinchas introduces the laws of inheritance, sparked by the courageous request of the daughters of Tzelofchad. When their father died without sons, they stepped forward and asked that his portion in the land not be lost. The Torah teaches that an inheritance is not just about possessions. It is about ensuring that what a person built continues to have meaning after they are gone.

### Practically Speaking

#### What have you inherited?

It is easy to assume that serious Torah study is only for rabbis or lifelong scholars. But the crown of Torah is waiting for whoever wants to wear it. The Rambam teaches that while the crowns of kingship and priesthood were given to specific families, the crown of Torah was given to all of Israel. A society of equal dignity is not one where everyone has the same wealth or power. It is one where the most important knowledge, knowledge of how to live, is available to everyone equally. Moshe's personal disappointment became a gift to every future generation.

Do you treat your Jewish education as a chore, or as a crown waiting to be worn?



## Try it out

### YOUNG STUDENTS:

How unfair would it be if only children of doctors were allowed to become doctors, or only children of musicians were allowed to play music. In Judaism, the most important thing we have is the Torah, and God made sure it belongs to everyone. You do not need to come from a famous family to be a great Torah scholar. You just need to be willing to learn. What is one thing you would like to learn more about?

### ADVANCING STUDENTS:

This week, choose one new Jewish topic to explore. Read a short piece about the parsha, ask someone to explain a prayer you do not fully understand, or simply look up the meaning behind a Jewish custom you have always taken for granted.



## 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.

### A View from the Top

#### LAYER 1: FIND THE TORAH TEXT: BAMIDBAR 27:12

"עֲלֵה אֶל־הָר הָעֵבְרִים הַזֶּה: וְרָאָה, אֶת־הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי, לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל."

#### LAYER 2: READ RABBI SACKS' TRANSLATION

"Ascend this mountain of Avarim, and gaze upon the land that I have given to the Israelites."

#### LAYER 3: THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS

God tells Moshe to climb the mountain to see the Promised Land, knowing he will never enter it. This must have been a heartbreaking moment. Yet Moshe does not complain. Instead, his immediate response is to ask God to appoint a new leader for the people. His focus is entirely on the future of the nation, not his own disappointment.

#### LAYER 4: LEARN FROM RABBI SACKS' COMMENTARY

"God grants Moshe one last gift: not entry into the land, but a glimpse of it from afar, from a mountaintop on the other side of the river. Moshe's life has not been in vain. He has taken the people almost all the way, but it will be a new generation who will complete the journey.

"Martin Luther King reminded his audience of the last day of Moshe's life on what turned out to be the last day of his. "We've got some difficult times ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop... And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know it is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to stand aside from it" (Avot 2:16). The Jewish story, in many ways, is the West's meta-narrative of hope."

#### LAYER 5: REFLECT AND RESPOND

We are all part of a journey that started long before we were born and will continue long after we are gone. Like Moshe, we may not see the final results of our hard work, but that does not mean our efforts are wasted. We each have a role to play in moving the story forward.

1. How does it feel to work hard on a project knowing you might not see it finished?
2. Why is hope such an important part of the Jewish story?
3. What is one small task you can start today to help future generations?

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



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