



Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

PINCHAS • פינחס

FROM THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF **RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS** ל"צז

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

This year's series of essays were originally written and recorded by Rabbi Sacks zt"l in 5773 (2012–2013). These timeless messages are accompanied by a new [Family Edition](#) created to inspire intergenerational learning on the Parsha.

On Parents and Teachers

Just beneath the surface of this week's Parsha is an exceptionally poignant story. It occurs in the context of Moses' prayer that God appoint a successor as leader of the Jewish people.

One hint is given in the words of God to Moses: "After you have seen you also will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was." Rashi is intrigued by the apparently superfluous word "also" and makes the comment that "Moses desired to die as Aaron had died."

In what sense was Moses envious of his brother? Was it that he, like Aaron, wished to die painlessly? Surely not. Moses was not afraid of pain. Was it that he envied his brother's popularity? Of Aaron it was said that when he died, he was mourned by "all the Children of Israel", something the Torah does not say in the case of Moses. This too cannot be the answer. Moses knew that leadership does not mean popularity. He did not seek it. He could not have done what he had to do and achieve it.

The Ktav Sofer gives what is surely the correct interpretation: Aaron had the privilege of knowing that his children would follow in his footsteps. Elazar, his son, was appointed as High Priest in his lifetime. Indeed to this day Kohanim are direct descendants of Aaron. According to Ktav Sofer,

Moses longed to see one of his sons, Gershom or Eliezer, take his place as leader of the people. It was not to be.

Rashi arrives at the same conclusion by noting a second clue. The passage in which Moses asks God to appoint a successor follows directly after the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, who asked that they be permitted to inherit the share in the Land of Israel that would have gone to their father, had he not died. Rashi links the two episodes: "When Moses heard God tell him to give the inheritance of Zelophehad to his daughters, he said to himself, 'The time has come that I should make a request of my own - that my sons should inherit my position.' God replied to him, 'This is not what I have decided. Joshua deserves to receive reward for serving you and never leaving your tent.' This is what Solomon meant when he said, 'He who keeps the vineyard shall eat its fruit and he that waits on his master shall be honoured.' Moses' prayer was not granted.

Thus, with their ears attuned to every nuance, the Sages and Rashi reconstructed a narrative that lies just beneath the surface of the biblical text. What happened to Moses' children? Was he, the great leader, inwardly disappointed that they did not inherit his role? What deeper message does the text

communicate to us? Is there something of continuing relevance in Moses' disappointment? Did God in any way provide him with consolation?

Moses and Aaron epitomise the two great roles in Jewish continuity - *horim* and *morim* - parents and teachers. A parent hands on the Jewish heritage to their children; a teacher does likewise to their disciples. Aaron was the archetypal parent; Moses the great example of a teacher.¹ Aaron was succeeded by his son; Moses by his disciple Joshua.

The Sages at various points emphasised that Torah leadership does not pass automatically across the generations. The Talmud states:

Be careful not to neglect the children of the poor, for from them Torah goes forth, as it is written, "the water shall flow out of his buckets", meaning "from the poor among them" goes forth Torah. And why is it not usual for scholars to give birth to children who are scholars? Rabbi Joseph said that it might not be said that Torah is their legacy. Rabbi Shisha, son of Rabbi Idi, said that they should not be arrogant towards the community. Mar Zutra said, because they act high-handedly towards the community.

Nedarim 81a

Were Torah leadership to be dynastic, a matter of inheritance, Judaism would quickly become a society of privilege and hierarchy. To this, the Sages were utterly opposed. Everyone has a share in Torah. It is the shared patrimony of every Jew. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in the great words of Maimonides:

With three crowns was Israel crowned - with the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of sovereignty. The crown of priesthood was bestowed on Aaron ... The crown of sovereignty was given to David ... The crown of Torah, however, is for all

Israel, as it is said, "Moses commanded us the Torah, as an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob." Whoever desires it can win it. Do not suppose that the other two crowns are greater than the crown of Torah, for it is said, "By Me, kings reign and princes decree justice. By Me, princes rule." Hence we learn the crown of Torah is greater than the other two crowns.

This is one of the great egalitarian statements in Judaism. The crown of Torah is available to whoever seeks it. There have been societies which sought to create equality by evenly distributing power or wealth. None succeeded fully. The Jewish approach was different. A society of equal dignity is one in which knowledge - the most important kind of knowledge, namely Torah, knowledge of how to live - is available equally to all. From earliest times to today, the Jewish people have predominantly been communities built around schools, sustained by communal funds so that none should be excluded.

The Sages drew a strong connection between home and school, parent and teacher. Thus, for example, Maimonides rules:

A duty rests on every scholar in Israel to teach all disciples who seek instruction from him, even if they are not his children, as it is said, "And you shall teach them diligently to your children." According to traditional authority, the term "your children" includes disciples, for disciples are called children, as it is said, "And the sons of the prophets came forth."²

In the same vein he writes elsewhere:

Just as a person is commanded to honour and revere his father, so he is under an obligation to honour and revere his teacher, even to a greater extent than his father, for his father gave him life in this world, while

¹ To this day we call him Moshe Rabbeinu, 'Moses our teacher'.

² II Kings 2:3.

his teacher who instructs him in wisdom
secures for him life in the World to Come.

The connection runs in the opposite direction also. Consistently throughout the Mosaic books, the role of a parent is defined in terms of teaching and instruction.

“You shall teach these things diligently to your children.”

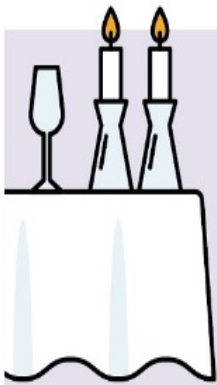
“It shall come to pass that when your child asks you ... thus shall you say to him.”

Education is a conversation across the generations, between parent and child. In the one verse in which the Bible explains why Abraham was chosen as the father of a new faith it says, “For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” Abraham was chosen to be both a parent and an educator.

Moses was therefore denied the chance to see his children inherit his role, so that his personal disappointment would become a source of hope to future generations. Torah leadership is not the

prerogative of an elite. It does not pass through dynastic succession. It is not confined to those descended from great scholars. It is open to each of us, if we will it and give it our best efforts of energy and time. But at the same time, Moses was given a great consolation. Just as, to this day, Kohanim are the sons of Aaron, so are all who study Torah the disciples of Moses.

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 Aaron, the other made eternal in Moses.



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?

● These questions come from this week’s **Family Edition** to Rabbi Sacks’ Covenant & Conversation. For an interactive, multi-generational study, check out the full edition at <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/pinchas/on-parents-and-teachers/>

<p>[1] Bamidbar Chapter 27 Verses 12-13 God said to Moses, 'Climb up to the Avarim Mountains where you will be able to see the land that I am giving to the Israelites. After you see it, you will be gathered up to your people, just as your brother Aaron was.</p>	<p><u>במדבר פרק כז (יב)</u> ויאמר ידוד אל משה עלה אל הר העברים הזה וראה את הארץ אשר נתתי לבני ישראל: (יג) וראיתה אתה ונאספת אל עמך גם אתה: כאשר נאסף אהרן אחיך</p>	<p>[4] Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 81a Be careful not to neglect the children of the poor, for from them Torah goes forth, as it is written, "the water shall flow out of his buckets [<i>midalyo</i>]", meaning "from the poor [<i>midallim</i>] among them" goes forth Torah. And why is it not usual for scholars to give birth to children who are scholars? Rabbi Joseph said, that it might not be said that Torah is their legacy. Rabbi Shisha son of Rabbi Idi said, that they should not be arrogant towards the community. Mar Zutra said, because they act high-handedly towards the community.</p>	<p><u>תלמוד בבלי מסכת נדרים דף פא עמוד א</u> שלחו מתם: הזהרו בערבוביתא, הזהרו בחבורה, הזהרו בבני עניים שמהן תצא תורה, שנאמר: +במדבר כד+ יזל מים מדליו, שמהן תצא תורה. ומפני מה אין מצויין ת"ח לצאת ת"ח מבניהן? אמר רב יוסף: שלא יאמרו תורה ירושה היא להם. רב ששת בריה דרב אידי אומר: כדי שלא יתגדרו על הצבור. מר זוטרא אומר: מפני שהן מתגברין על הצבור.</p>
<p>[2] Rashi on Bamidbar Chapter 27 Verse 13 Just as your brother Aaron was – From here we understand that Moses desired to die as Aaron had died.</p>	<p><u>רש"י במדבר פרק כז (יג)</u> כאשר נאסף אהרן אחיך - מכאן שנתאוה משה למיתתו של אהרן</p>		
<p>[3] Rashi on Bamidbar Chapter 27 Verse 16 When Moses heard God tell him to give the inheritance of Zelophehad to his daughters, he said to himself, 'The time has come that I should make a request of my own -- that my sons should inherit my position.' God replied to him, 'This is not what I have decided. Joshua deserves to receive reward for serving you and never leaving your tent.' This is what Solomon meant when he said, 'He keeps the vineyard shall eat its fruit.'</p>	<p><u>רש"י במדבר פרק כז (טז)</u> יפקד ה' - כיון ששמע משה שאמר לו המקום תן נחלת צלפחד לבנותיו אמר הגיע שעה שאתבע צרכי שיירשו בני את גדולתי. אמר לו הקב"ה לא כך עלתה במחשבה לפני, כדאי הוא יהושע ליטול שכר שמושו שלא מש מתוך האהל. וזהו שאמר שלמה (משלי כז, יח) נוצר תאנה יאכל פריה</p>		

<p>[5] Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah Chapter 3 Halachah 1 With three crowns was Israel crowned - with the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of sovereignty. The crown of priesthood was bestowed on Aaron . . . The crown of sovereignty was given to David . . . The crown of Torah, however, is for all Israel, as it is said, “Moses commanded us the Torah, as an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.” Whoever desires it can win it. Do not suppose that the other two crowns are greater than the crown of Torah, for it is said, “By me [the Torah] kings reign and princes decree justice. By me, princes rule.” Hence we learn the crown of Torah is greater than the other two crowns.</p>	<p>רמב"ם הלכות תלמוד תורה פרק ג הלכה א בשלשה כתרים נכתרו ישראל, כתר תורה וכתר כהונה וכתר מלכות, כתר כהונה זכה בו אהרן שנאמר והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהנת עולם, כתר מלכות זכה בו דוד שנאמר זרעו לעולם יהיה וכסאו כשמש נגדי, כתר תורה הרי מונח ועומד ומוכן לכל ישראל, שנאמר תורה לכו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב, כל מי שירצה יבא ויטול, שמא תאמר שאותם הכתרים גדולים מכתר תורה הרי הוא אומר בי מלכים ימלוכו ורוזנים יחוקקו צדק בי שרים ישורו, הא למדת שכתר תורה גדול משניהם.</p>
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<p>[6] Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah Chapter 1 Halachah 2 A duty rests on every scholar in Israel to teach all disciples who seek instruction from him, even if they are not his children, as it is said, “And you shall teach them diligently to your children”. According to traditional authority, the term “your children” includes disciples, for <i>disciples are called children</i>, as it is said, “And the sons of the prophets [meaning, the disciples of the prophets] came forth” (II Kings 2:3).</p>	<p>רמב"ם הלכות תלמוד תורה פרק א הלכה ב כשם שחייב אדם ללמד את בנו כך הוא חייב ללמד את בן בנו שנאמר והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך, ולא בנו ובן בנו בלבד אלא מצוה על כל חכם וחכם מישראל ללמד את כל התלמידים לע"פ שאינן בניו, שנאמר ושננתם לבניך מפי השמועה למדו בניך אלו תלמידיך שהתלמידים קרויין בנים שנאמר ויצאו בני הנביאים</p>
<p>[7] Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah Chapter 5 Halachah 1 Just as a person is commanded to honour and revere his father, so he is under an obligation to honour and revere his teacher, even to a greater extent than his father, for his father gave him life in this world, while his teacher who instructs him in wisdom secures for him life in the world to come.</p>	<p>רמב"ם הלכות תלמוד תורה פרק ה הלכה א כשם שאדם מצווה בכבוד אביו ויראתו כך הוא חייב בכבוד רבו ויראתו יתר מאביו, שאביו מביאו לחיי העולם הזה ורבו שלמדו חכמה מביאו לחיי העולם הבא</p>

<p>[8] Devarim Chapter 6 Verse 7 Teach them to your children and speak of them when you are at home, when travelling on the road, when you lie down and when you rise up.</p>	<p>דברים פרק ו (ז) ושננתם לבניך ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך</p>
<p>[9] Shemot Chapter 13 Verse 14 Your child may later ask you, 'What is this?' You must answer him, 'With a show of power, God brought us out of Egypt, the place of slavery.'</p>	<p>שמות פרק יג (יד) והיה כי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמר מה זאת ואמרת אליו בחזק יד הוציאנו ידוד ממצרים מבית עבדים:</p>
<p>[10] Bereishit Chapter 18 Verse 19 I have given him special attention so that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will keep God's way, doing charity and justice. God will then bring about for Abraham everything He promised.</p>	<p>בראשית פרק יח (יט) כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו ושמרו דרך ידוד לעשות צדקה ומשפט למען הביא ידוד על אברהם את אשר דבר עליו:</p>