

Covenant and Conversation Family Edition
Bereshit • Shemot



Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Family Edition

BERESHIT • SHEMOT

The Tabacinic Edition

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

DEVELOPED WITH

Rabbi Daniel Rose

The Rabbi Sacks Legacy
Maggid Books

*Covenant and Conversation Family Edition
Bereshit-Shemot*

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The Tabacinic Edition

**COVENANT &
CONVERSATION**
Family Edition

pays tribute to the memory of

Mr. Manuel Tabacinic z"l

מנחם מנדל בן אברהם שמואל ז"ל

Mrs. Sonia Tabacinic (née Lustgarten) z"l

שיינדל בת צבי הירש ז"ל

Mr. Sami Rohr z"l

שמואל בן יהושע אליהו ז"ל

Mrs. Charlotte Rohr (née Kastner) z"l

שרה בת יקותיאל יהודה ז"ל

Together they merited to see all their children build lives
enriched by faithful commitment
to the spreading of Torah and Ahavat Yisrael.

Dedicated with love by their children

Moshe and Lillian Tabacinic

Miami, Florida 2023

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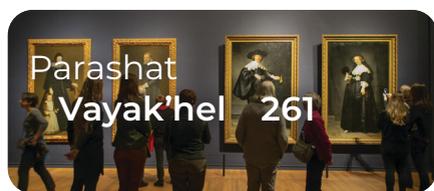
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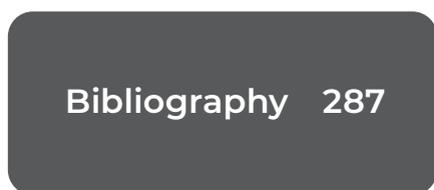
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Introduction

The Israelites, slaves in Egypt for more than two hundred years, were about to go free.... On the brink of their release, Moshe, the leader of the Jews, gathered them together and prepared to address them. He might have spoken about freedom. He could have given a stirring address about the promised land to which they were travelling, the “land flowing with milk and honey.” Or he might have prepared them for the journey that lay ahead, the long march across the wilderness.

*Instead, Moshe delivered a series of addresses that seemed to make no sense in the context of that particular moment. He presented a new idea, revolutionary in character, whose implications remain challenging even now. He spoke about children, and the distant future, and the duty to pass on memory to generations yet unborn.... **About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators.***

Freedom, Moshe suggested, is won, not on the battlefield, nor in the political arena, but in the human imagination and will. To defend a land, you need an army. But to defend freedom, you need education. You need families and schools to ensure that your ideals are passed on to the next generation, and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. The citadels of liberty are houses of study. Its heroes are teachers, its passion is education and the life of the mind. Moshe realised that a people achieves immortality not by building temples or mausoleums, but by engraving their values on the hearts of their children, and they on theirs, and so on until the end of time.

*The Israelites built living monuments – monuments to life – and became a people dedicated to bringing new generations into being and handing on to them the heritage of the past. **Their great institutions were the family and education via the conversation between the generations.***¹

A Nation of Educators

Early on in *A Letter in the Scroll*,² arguably the book in which Rabbi Sacks *zt”l* most clearly articulated his philosophy of Judaism, he wrote about the value of education in Judaism and Jewish civilisation. This theme permeated his work across the many mediums through which he impacted the world, from books to *parasha*

¹ *A Letter in the Scroll*, 33–34.

² Published in the United Kingdom under the title *Radical Then, Radical Now*.

commentary, from his frequent articles and broadcasts in the media to his speeches in the House of Lords. It was clear to him that “for Jews, education is not just what we know. It’s *who we are*.”³

But if you look closely, you will notice how he places this responsibility not solely on teachers and schools. He did not believe in the outsourcing of the responsibility for education to professionals. For Rabbi Sacks, the primary institution of education in the life of a Jewish child is the family, and the foremost educator with the deepest impact is the parent.

To launch the first annual *Communities in Conversation* initiative, marking Rabbi Sacks’s *yahrzeit*, his daughter, Gila Sacks, said of her father:

Perhaps the most defining feature of my father’s life, one that I don’t think I fully appreciated until after he died, was that he learned and learned, and continued to learn every single day, until his last. He learned from books, from text, from laws. He learned from history and from world events. But, mainly, he learned from people. He would seek out people to learn from, from every possible path of life. And he would seek out what he could learn from everyone he met. And he would do this through conversation, through talking and listening. So for him, conversation was a defining and spiritual act, a way of opening ourselves up to something beyond ourselves, of being challenged, the only way we could really become more than we were before. A training, perhaps, for opening ourselves up to God.

This captures the pedagogical vision behind the *Family Editions* – a resource for parents and families (as well as schools and teachers) to enhance the “conversation between the generations.”

Overview

In 2007 Rabbi Sacks embarked on an ambitious new project – to write an essay on the weekly *parasha* every week, to be disseminated around the world. He called this *Covenant & Conversation*, and he continued the project through many more *parasha* cycles, until the end of his life. The brilliance of these essays was the way Rabbi Sacks found complex ideas of Jewish thought expressed in the week’s Torah reading, articulated them and made them relevant to our lives today, enriching our understanding of them through contemporary wisdom (what he would later come to term *hokhma* – science, including the social sciences, as well as popular culture). In writing these essays in beautiful and elegant language which was nevertheless accessible to all (including non-Jews), he elevated style to the level of substance. As an educator and a parent, for many years I believed that these simple yet sophisticated essays could be adapted for a younger audience, and on several occasions I used them in my own classroom with middle and high school students.

In 2016 Rabbi Sacks and his team intensified their investment in resources to help Jewish educators in their work. I was privileged to be part of this initiative, and one of the projects we worked on together was two cycles of *Covenant & Conversation Family Edition*, and thereafter a cycle based on a similar approach focusing on the festivals, which we called *Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition*. Rabbi Sacks passed away between the release of the Sukkot and Hanukkah editions, on the twentieth of Marḥeshvan 5781. We completed the cycle, and the team at The Rabbi Sacks Legacy has been dedicated to bringing the Torah of Rabbi Sacks to as wide an audience as possible ever since.

3 Letter 4: Jewish Education, in *Letters to the Next Generation*.

Educational Vision Behind the Family Editions

In order to make the ideas contained in the main edition of the *Covenant & Conversation* essay accessible for younger audiences and families of various ages sitting around the Shabbat table, we divided the ideas into manageable segments, each for a progressively older developmental age. The sections found in the *Covenant & Conversation Family Edition* are as follows:



IN A NUTSHELL is a short summary of the *parasha* for all ages.



THE CORE IDEA presents a key thought extracted from the main essay, with the language adapted to be more accessible to a younger audience (middle school age) as well as older teenagers and adults.



IT ONCE HAPPENED is a story that illustrates or complements the ideas found in *The Core Idea* and the *Thinking More Deeply* sections. These stories are appropriate for all ages.



THINKING MORE DEEPLY presents the remainder of the *Covenant & Conversation* main essay (sometimes in edited form and with specific words replaced with language that teens will be more comfortable with) and would be appropriate for older teenagers and adults. This section does not stand alone, but should be read together with *The Core Idea*.

These sections are all followed by **QUESTIONS TO PONDER** which are designed to be used for reflection and conversation around the texts and ideas found in them. Suggested answers to these questions are found in an **EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS** at the end of each chapter.



FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS presents a short quote from somewhere in the canon of writings of Rabbi Sacks that connects to and enriches our understanding of the ideas contained in the *Covenant & Conversation Family Edition*.



AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE provides three questions that families can discuss on the *parasha* together. They are normally based on Rabbi Sacks's understanding of the *parasha* as presented in the *Covenant & Conversation* essay. Whether those around the table have read the main essay, or the *Family Edition*, all will be able to use these questions as a basis for conversation about the ideas.

In the Words of Rabbi Sacks

When *Covenant & Conversation Family Edition* was launched for 5779 (in October 2018), and again when the *Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition* was launched for 5781 (September 2020), Rabbi Sacks made videos to explain the vision behind the projects. Here are excerpts from these transcripts:

I have called these essays Covenant & Conversation because this for me is the essence of what Torah learning is – throughout the ages and for us now. The text of the Torah is our covenant with God; the interpretation of this text has been the subject of an ongoing conversation that began at Sinai and has never ceased. Every

age has added its commentaries, and so must ours. That is what I have tried to do each week through my Covenant & Conversation essays.

That is why I am so excited by the new Family Edition of Covenant & Conversation. The Family Edition is an accompanying resource which will take the core ideas from the main Covenant & Conversation essay for each parasha, and present them in a simpler fashion, as a way of engaging older children and teenagers.

We hope you'll find this a useful resource to deepen your understanding of the covenant of our Torah, but of equal importance to engage in a meaningful conversation about our Torah with our children and the next generation. Participating in that conversation, and encouraging your children to participate with you, is a major part of what it is to be a Jew, because we are the people who never stopped learning the Book of Life, our most precious gift from the God of Life. There is nothing more beautiful or life affirming than learning Torah with your children. Give them the space not only to be your students, but also to be your teachers, and they will grow tall. That's how we can truly secure the Jewish future.

A framework for engaging with these ideas and enhancing discussion around the Shabbat table. That is what the Shabbat table is really all about.

The Ceremony & Celebration Family Edition is a resource for families based around the ḥagim, which form such crucial aspects and key moments and educational opportunities throughout the year. This is a wonderful way of starting and sustaining a conversation with your children, and that is something through which you will grow and they will grow. Jewish education has always been based around three institutions: the school, the shul, and the home, and all three are important.

Acknowledgements

We are pleased to acknowledge and thank Lillian and Moshe Tabacnic for their critical support for this series of books. Lillian and Moshe are renowned for their support for Jewish education both in Florida and beyond and we are honoured that they have partnered with us on this exciting project. On behalf of all at Koren, and the families across the Jewish world that will learn from and enjoy these volumes, thank you.

Working for both Koren Jerusalem and The Rabbi Sacks Legacy has been a privilege and an honour and has given me the opportunity to collaborate with so many talented and creative people. Thanks to Joanna Benarroch, Dan Sacker, Debby Ifield, and Jonny Lipczer at The Rabbi Sacks Legacy, who, together with Rabbi Sacks, believed in the vision and possibilities for creating these educational resources, and gave me the opportunity of a lifetime to develop exciting projects such as this one. I would also like to thank the Sacks family for their belief in and support of this and all the educational projects I have been involved in on behalf of The Rabbi Sacks Legacy. Thank you for entrusting to us the holy work of continuing the legacy of Rabbi Sacks and bringing his ideas to a younger audience.

Thank you to our team at Koren whose professionalism, creativity, and expertise can be found on every page. These include Aryeh Grossman for being my educational soundboard, Tani Bayer for the creative design, Tomi Mager for typesetting what became a very complex project, and finally to Caryn Meltz who brings everything together in a way that defies description, as well as our proofreaders, Nechama Unterman and Tali Simon. Of course, thanks must always go to our boss, the publisher Matthew Miller, for his support, leadership, and vision.

Finally, to my family, for their love, support, and inspiration. Our Shabbat table was the first of many around the world to explore the ideas of Rabbi Sacks on the *parasha* as a family using this medium, and your input and inspiration can be found throughout these volumes.

The last word goes to my teacher and Rav, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *zt"l*. Not a day goes past without a sense of feeling bereft without you to lead and inspire us. Your commitment and passion to bring your ideas to young people and your belief in my ability to help you to do it gives me the strength to continue with this endeavour. The *Covenant & Conversation* essay that was sent around the world for the Shabbat that fell during the *shiva*, entitled *Beginning the Journey*, explored Avraham's faith in the covenant and the promises from God, despite only experiencing the very beginning of their fulfilment in his lifetime. The essay concludes with these words:

*Leaders see the destination, begin the journey, and leave behind them those who will continue it. That is enough to endow a life with immortality.*⁴

It is my privilege to count myself among the many who are driven to continue your journey. It is my hope that these volumes will be a significant step in that journey.

Daniel Rose
Modiin
Shevat 5783

4 “*Hayei Sara: Beginning the Journey*,” in *Lessons in Leadership*, 23.



Parashat Bereshit



IN A NUTSHELL

In this *parasha* we learn about the story of how the world was created, including all the animals and humans who live in it. God creates the world in six days and gives the world Shabbat, a day of holiness and rest, on the seventh day.

One of God's creations is Adam, the first human. God tells us that "it is not good for man to be alone," and so He creates Hava. They live in the Garden of Eden and are allowed to eat from all the trees and plants, except the Tree of Knowledge. The snake convinces them to sin by eating from it, so God punishes them by making them leave the perfect world of the Garden of Eden.

The rest of the stories in our *parasha*, which continue into the next *parasha*, are tales of sadness and tragedy, and show how we can all make mistakes. For example, Kayin, Adam and Hava's son, becomes the first person to kill another human being when he kills his brother, Hevel. By the end of the *parasha*, God sees how wicked man can become.

QUESTION TO PONDER

*Why do you think humans make so many mistakes?
How can God help us to stop this from happening?*

I. The Genesis of Love



THE CORE IDEA

There are two different versions of the story of creation. The first is in Bereshit 1, the second in Bereshit 2–3. There are many differences between the two accounts and I want to concentrate on one of these: the two different ways the first man gives a name to the first woman.

In the first, Adam calls woman *isha*, “for she was taken from man (*ish*).” In the second, Adam calls his wife Eve (*Hava*), “because she was the mother of all life.”

In the first version, the man names not a person, but a class, a category. He uses a noun, not a name. The other person is, for him, simply “woman,” a type, not an individual. In the second, he gives his wife a proper name. She has become, for him, a person in her own right.

Only *after* the man has given his wife a proper name do we find the Torah referring to God Himself by His proper name alone, namely *Hashem* (in Bereshit 4). Until then He has been described as either *Elokim* or *Hashem Elokim* – *Elokim* being the impersonal aspect of God: God as law, God as power, God as justice. In other words, *our relationship to God parallels our relationship to one another. Only when we respect and recognise the uniqueness of another person are we capable of respecting and recognising the uniqueness of God Himself.*



IT ONCE HAPPENED...

Hello. My name is Rafi. You can call me Rafi. That is what my friends and family call me. Sometimes. Sometimes I have other names though. Sometimes my sisters call me Ruffles or Rufus. Sometimes my brother calls me the Rafmeister. Sometimes friends just call me Levy. I don't really like that too much. My name is Rafi. When I am called to the Torah, I am Raphael Eliyahu ben Aryeh Elisha. When I am ill, I am Raphael Eliyahu ben Miriam Tzofia.

My parents chose my names because my sister was ill when I was born, and Raphael means God who heals, and is the name of the angel who heals on behalf of God.

Eliyahu was my mother's grandfather, who died before I was born. He survived the Holocaust and came to Israel and fought in the War of Independence. It feels like an honour to be named after him.

But my name is Rafi. You can call me Rafi.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. *What is the difference between a noun and a proper name? Is it similar to being called by your first and last names?*
2. *When do we use the name Elokim for God and when do we use Hashem?*
3. *What can we learn about our relationship with God from our relationships with humans?*

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. *How many different names does Rafi have? Why so many?*
2. *Why doesn't Rafi like to be called Levy? Why does he like to be called Rafi? What do you like to be called? Why?*



THINKING MORE DEEPLY

Let us return to the two creation accounts, looking at what they can tell us about creation. In Bereshit 1, God creates *things* – chemical elements, stars, planets, life forms, biological species. In Bereshit 2–3, He creates *people*. In the first chapter, He creates systems; in the second chapter He creates relationships. It is fundamental to the Torah's view of reality that these things belong to different worlds, distinct narratives, separate stories, alternative ways of seeing reality.

There are differences in tone as well. In the first, creation involves no effort on the part of God. He simply speaks. He says, “Let there be,” and there was. In the second, He is actively engaged. When it comes to the creation of the first human, He does not merely say, “Let us make man in our image according to our likeness.” He performs the creation Himself, like a sculptor fashioning an image out of clay: “Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

In Bereshit 1, God effortlessly summons the universe into being. In Bereshit 2, He becomes a gardener: “Now the Lord God planted a garden...” We wonder why on earth God, who has just created the entire universe, should become a gardener. The Torah gives us the answer, and it is very moving: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” God wanted to give man the dignity of work, of being a creator, not just a creation. And in case the man should view such labour as undignified, God became a gardener Himself to show that

this work too is divine, and in performing it, man becomes God's partner in the work of creation.

Then comes the extraordinarily poignant verse, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” God feels for the existential isolation of the first man. There was no such moment in the previous chapter. There, God simply creates. Here, God empathises. He enters into the human mind. He feels what we feel. There is no such moment in any other ancient religious literature. What is radical about biblical monotheism is not just that there is

only one God, not just that He is the source of all that exists, but that *God is closer to us than we are to ourselves*. God knew the loneliness of the first man before the first man knew it of himself.

That is what the second creation account is telling us. Creation of things is relatively easy; creation of relationships is hard. Look at the tender concern God

shows for the first human beings in Bereshit 2–3. He wants man to have the dignity of work. He wants man to know that work itself is divine. He gives man the capacity to name the animals. He cares when He senses the onset of loneliness. He creates the first woman. He watches, in exasperation, as the first human couple commit the first sin. Finally, when the man gives his wife a proper name, recognising for the first time that she is different from him and that she can do something he will never do, He clothes them both so that they will not go naked into the world. That is the God, not of creation (*Elokim*) but of love (*Hashem*).

That is what makes the dual account of the naming of the first woman so significant a parallel to the dual account of God's creation of the universe. We

“Creation of things is relatively easy; creation of relationships is hard.”

have to create relationships before we encounter the God of relationship. We have to make space for the otherness of the human other to be able to make space for the otherness of the divine other. We have to give love before we can receive love.

In Bereshit 1, God creates the universe. Nothing vaster can be imagined, and we keep discovering that the universe is bigger than we thought. In 2016, a study based on three-dimensional modelling of images produced by the Hubble space telescope concluded that there were between ten and twenty times as many galaxies as astronomers had previously thought. There are more than a hundred stars for every grain of sand on earth.

And yet, almost in the same breath as it speaks of the panoply of creation, the Torah tells us that God took time to breathe the breath of life into the first human, give him dignified work, enter his loneliness, make him a wife, and robe them both with

garments of light when the time came for them to leave Eden and make their way in the world.

The Torah is telling us something very powerful. Never think of people as things. Never think of people as types: they are individuals. Never be content with creating systems: care also about relationships.

I believe that relationships are where our humanity is born and grows, flowers and flourishes. It is by loving people that we learn to love God and feel the fullness of His love for us.

QUESTION TO PONDER

What can you learn from the relationships in your life to help develop your relationship with God?

“It is by loving people that we learn to love God and feel the fullness of His love for us.”



FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

God is not about power but relationships. Religion is not about control but about freedom. God is found less in nature than in human society, in the structures we make to honour His presence by honouring His image in other human beings.

A Letter in the Scroll, 76



AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Why do you think there are two separate and contrasting descriptions of how God created humankind?
2. What is deeply problematic with the first name (*isha*) that Adam gave to his wife?
3. How can we learn to love God from loving the people in our life?

EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS

IN A NUTSHELL

Humans are, by definition, imperfect, and God gave humanity free will, allowing us to make mistakes. Perhaps this is the message of these stories so early in the book of Bereshit. But this doesn't mean that we shouldn't strive to be better (even if we will never reach perfection). To help us do this, God gave us a code of laws and values to live by. He also created the idea of *teshuva* (repentance) to show us that our mistakes do not need to define us, and we will always be able to start again and become better people.

THE CORE IDEA

1. Nouns are the words we use to refer to things, places, or people, in a non-personal way. A noun describes a "type." A proper name, on the other hand, is a way to refer to someone specific, in a personal way, and suggests some kind of relationship. (The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber spoke about I-It and I-Thou relationships. Nouns are used in I-It relationships, and proper names in I-Thou relationships, which are more personal and intimate.) When someone refers to you by your last name only, it suggests a lack of personal relationship and intimacy. Although a family name is part of your proper name, when you are called by your family name, it may feel like the person is demonstrating that they see you as part of a group or category (in this case, your wider family) rather than seeing you as an individual in your own right.
2. *Elokim* is a more generic name for God (and in fact is sometimes used to refer to other "gods" that were worshipped in biblical times). It is also often used to refer to God in the context of law and justice (i.e., less personal), rather than the four-letter name of God (the Tetragrammaton – the name we do not read out loud, but rather read as *Hashem* – "The Name"), which is a proper name for God and suggests a more personal and intimate relationship with Him.

3. Only when we respect and recognise the uniqueness of another person are we capable of respecting and recognising the uniqueness of God Himself. But we can also conclude that only when we see God as an "other" with whom we wish to form a relationship (represented by the use of proper names) will we be able to develop a relationship with Him. Just as with human relationships, a relationship with God takes thought and effort.

IT ONCE HAPPENED...

1. There are six names mentioned in the story for Rafi. We all have many names used by different people in our lives at different times, each one appropriate for a specific aspect of our identity.
2. Rafi is the way he is called by those who love him the most, like his parents and close friends. Levy is his surname, and it is suggested that the person using it doesn't feel close to Rafi and is not interested in a close relationship. (It should be noted that this is not always true – sometimes children use last names without meaning to send this message, and sometimes those childhood friends become lifelong friends who still sometimes refer to you by your last name out of habit or as a nickname.)

THINKING MORE DEEPLY

Relationships take work, whether they are with family, friends, or God, and we cannot take for granted any relationship, even one that seems guaranteed (like a parent-child relationship, or in fact our relationship with God). Building and developing relationships with other humans, who are also created in the image of God (see *From the Thought of Rabbi Sacks*), can help us understand how to do the same with God.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. In describing the creation of Adam and Hava in two very different and contrasting ways in the first

two chapters of Bereshit, the Torah is showing us two distinct aspects of what it means to be a human being. Rabbi Soloveitchik's thesis in his work *The Lonely Man of Faith* is that both aspects of man (Majestic Man and Covenantal Man) exist within each of us, and both are sanctioned by God. The Torah is helping us to be aware of these aspects of our personalities and to maintain a healthy balance between them.

2. One of the contrasts between the two versions describing the creation of humanity is the way Adam named his wife. We can learn about these two aspects of humankind presented in Rabbi Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith* (Majestic Man and Covenantal Man), and therefore ourselves, from the way Adam chose to name his wife. In the first instance, he named her *isha*, the generic

name for the female human. This is because he saw her merely as a "type," a partner for developing and dominating the world. This is because Majestic Man's priority is to create and build. But the danger is that if Adam fails to see the humanity in Hava and cannot even find a proper name to call her by, with which to build a relationship with her, then he risks devaluing her and mistreating her. Seeing other human beings as "things" can lead to devastatingly evil events, as we have seen throughout history.

3. When we realise that we must treat our fellow human beings with dignity, as people in their own right, people who are created in the image of God, we can form relationships with them and come to love them. When we learn this lesson, we are then ready to embark on developing a mutual and intimate relationship with God.

II. The Three Stages of Creation



THE CORE IDEA

At the beginning of our *parasha*, we learn how God created mankind. He did this by creating man “in His image, after His likeness.” This is a difficult idea to understand because we believe that God *has no image*. “Image,” then, must refer to something quite different than physical form and likeness. The Torah here is telling us we can be like God in the way we act.

Our *parasha* is the first in the Torah, so we haven’t seen or learned much about God yet. What have we seen God do so far? The God we are reading about is the One who creates. The Torah here is telling us that we can be like God and imitate Him, by becoming creators. Just as God is creative, so we should try to be creative.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. *How does God act? How can we copy that in our lives?*
2. *What did you create this week? What did you achieve that you are proud of?*
3. *Why does God want us to become creators like Him? Why is creating things good for us and good for the world?*



IT ONCE HAPPENED...

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook was the first chief rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine. When World War I erupted he found himself stuck in London where he remained for the duration of the war until he could return to the land of Israel. Rabbi Kook spoke about how during his time in London he would often visit the National Gallery to admire the art there. His favourite artist was Rembrandt, whom he described as a *tzaddik*, a righteous person.

When he examined Rembrandt’s paintings it reminded him of the rabbinic statement about the light created on the first day of creation – “When God created the light [on the first day], it was so strong and luminous that it was possible to see from one end of the world to the other. And God feared that the wicked would make use of it [for destructive purposes]. What did He do? He hid it for the righteous in the world to come. But from time to time there are great men whom God blesses with a vision of that hidden light.” Rabbi Kook believed that Rembrandt was one of those great men who could perceive the *or ganuz* (hidden light), and he presented that light in his paintings.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. *What do you think Rembrandt was trying to say in his paintings when he chose to have ordinary people radiating with a spiritual light?*
2. *If all people are created in the image of God, is there beauty in all people? How do we find that beauty?*

What is equally puzzling and wonderful about Rembrandt's paintings is that he makes no attempt to beautify or idealise his subjects. Yet the light radiates from the ordinary people in his paintings. Rembrandt's brilliance is his ability to convey the beauty of ordinary people. The light that shines from them is, simply, their humanity. Their tzelem Elokim (image of God).



THINKING MORE DEEPLY

Three Stages of Creation: "And God said, 'Let there be...' And there was... and God saw that it was good."

In the first chapter of Bereshit, God creates man "in His image, after His likeness." We believe that God has no physical form, so being created in "His image" must refer to some other likeness between humanity and God. The Torah tells us we have the potential to be like God in our actions, and we do that by imitating Him. This could mean many things, but the primary role we see God playing in the first chapter of Bereshit is as Creator. Just as God is creative, so we should try to be creative.

Bereshit teaches us how to be creative – in three stages. The first stage is saying "Let there be." The second is "and there was." The third stage is seeing "that it is good."

What makes humans unique among other animals is our ability to speak. Targum Onkelos translates the last phrase of Bereshit 2:7, "God formed man out of dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living creature," as "and man became *ruah memallela*, a speaking spirit." Because we can speak, we can think, and therefore imagine a world different from the one that currently exists. Creation begins with the creative word, the idea, the vision, the dream. Language – and

with it the ability to remember a distant past and think about a distant future – lies at the heart of our uniqueness as the image of God. Just as God makes the physical world by words ("*And God said, 'Let there be...'*") so we make our human world by words, which is why Judaism takes words so seriously: "*Life and death are in the power of the tongue,*" says the book of Mishlei (18:21). This is the first stage of creation.

The second stage of creation ("*And God said, 'Let there be'... and there was*") is for us the most

difficult to achieve. It is one thing to have an idea, another to make it happen. It is so often too easy to give up after failure, and to conclude that nothing ultimately can be achieved, that the world is as it is, and that all human efforts will end in failure.

If the first stage in creation is imagination, the second is will. The sanctity of the human will is one of the most distinct

features of the Torah. There have been many philosophies that believe that humans do not have free will. This is called determinism – that we are determined by other factors, like genetics, or economic or social forces. Judaism is a protest against these ideas. We are not pre-programmed machines; we are persons, who have free will. Just as God is free, so we are free, and the entire Torah is a call to

"Because we can speak, we can think, and therefore imagine a world different from the one that currently exists."

humanity to exercise responsible freedom in creating a social world which honours the freedom of others. Free will is the bridge from “*Let there be*” to “*and there was.*”

The third stage (“*And God saw that it was good*”) is the hardest of the three stages to understand. What does it mean to say that “*God saw that it was good*”? What does God make that is not good? Here the challenge is to see the good that is sometimes hidden.

In the course of my work, I have visited prisons and centres for young offenders. Many of the people I met there were potentially good. They, like you and me, had dreams, hopes, ambitions, aspirations. They did not want to become criminals. Their tragedy was that often they came from difficult backgrounds. No one took the time to care for them, support them, teach them how to negotiate the

world, how to achieve what they wanted through hard work rather than violence and lawbreaking. They lacked a basic self-respect, a sense of their own worth. No one ever told them that they were good. To see that someone is good and to say so is a creative act itself. To see the good in others and let them see themselves the way we see them is to help someone grow to become the best they can be. “*Greater,*” says the Talmud, “*is one who causes others to do good than one who does good himself.*” To help others become what they can be is to give birth to creativity in someone else’s soul.

“*And God saw that it was good*” – this too is part of the work of creation, the subtlest and most beautiful of all. When we recognise the goodness in someone, we do more than create it, we help it to become creative. This is what God does for us, and what He calls on us to do for others.



FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

Judaism is a critique of empire and the rule of the strong.

In the first chapter of Bereshit we are told that every human being is in the image and likeness of God. This is not an abstract metaphysical proposition. It is a political statement of potentially explosive force. The kings and pharaohs of the ancient world were seen as gods, the children of the gods, or the sole intermediary of the gods. They presided over hierarchical societies in which there was an absolute, ontological differences between rulers and ruled.

By stating that not just the king, but everyone, is in the image of God, the Bible was opposing the entire political universe of the ancient world. Every individual is sacrosanct. Every life is sacred. The human person as such has inalienable dignity. Here is the birth of the biblical revolution, which did not materialise in the West until the seventeenth century with the articulation of the concept of human rights, meaning the rights we bear simply because we are human. Babel is the symbol of the sacrifice of the individual to the state. Avraham, by contrast, is to become the symbol of all individuals in search of worth as individuals. **The Hebrew Bible is a sustained protest against empire, hierarchy, ruling elites, and the enslavement of the masses.**

Future Tense, 77–78

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. *What does it mean for society if we believe that everyone is created in the “image of God,” not just the king or the elite?*
2. *In this Covenant & Conversation essay, Rabbi Sacks challenges us to see the good in creation (the third stage of creation). How does the belief in all people being created in the “image of God” help us to do that?*



AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. If God is incorporeal (has no physical form) how can we be created in the “*image of God*”? What then do you think it means to be created “*in the image of God*”?
2. What does the power of speech allow us to do that God’s other creations cannot?
3. Rabbi Sacks’s third stage of creation (and creativity) is to see the good in all things and all people. Is there good in everything and everyone? How do we find it?

EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS

THE CORE IDEA

1. We believe that God is the ultimate source of goodness in the world and therefore He always acts with goodness. This can take the form of many of the characteristics we attribute to Him, such as compassion, mercy, kindness, and justice. We can and should copy these characteristics in the way we live our lives, and some believe that is the basis for the mitzvot, to help us to do this. However, the God that we encounter in the first chapter of Bereshit is primarily the Creator. So perhaps being created in God’s image here means we are created in order to become creators ourselves.
2. Children should be encouraged to understand that “being creative” does not just mean being physically creative with our hands. It can also mean lots of other ways in which we improve the world and society around us. Making a person smile or feel loved is also a creative act!
3. God has created a world for us to benefit from and asked us to help improve it. In fact, Rabbi Sacks believes our primary destiny in the world is to achieve *tikkun olam* – the perfecting of the world. The ultimate fulfilment of Judaism is to heal the fractures in the world and we do that by being creative, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

IT ONCE HAPPENED...

1. All humans are created in the image of God, which means they all have spiritual worth and spiritual

beauty. This is not necessarily talking about physical beauty, although it can also be argued that all of God’s creations have physical beauty, if we only look for it carefully. The spiritual beauty of being created in the image of God can be found in all human beings, irrespective of gender, race, colour, creed, or culture.

2. According to this line of thought, there is spiritual beauty in all human beings, if we are just open to seeing it. Instead of judging a person’s beauty by superficial external factors, we have to delve into their souls, by getting to know them, to see their true beauty and spiritual worth.

FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

1. In ancient times (and even more recently than that) society was more hierarchical. Only the elite, who had power because of their wealth or status, were seen as being divine and having inherent value. There are still some societies in the world that function like this. Judaism and the Torah brought a radical idea into the world that is the basis of Western liberal democratic societies today – that all people are created equal and should have the same rights because of that. This is because every human being is created in the image of God.
2. Once we see the image of God in each human being, we can see the goodness in them. This means we can also see the good and value in everything they do and create. There is so much good in

creation. Some of it is from the Creator, and some of it is from His creations who have created in their own right.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Being created in the image of God does not mean humans have a physical likeness to God, but rather a spiritual likeness. This could mean many different things. On some level, it is whatever distinguishes us from the animal world. Animals are not created in the image of God. So what makes humans distinct from animals? Here are some suggestions: speech (communication); the power of abstract thought; free choice (and the power to be good and selfless); a divine soul (a higher soul as compared

to the lower animal soul) and therefore the ability to connect to the Divine.

2. The power of speech allows humankind to organise themselves in larger societies, collaborating and working in unison for the greater good of the group and society as a whole. This allows us to develop as a species and build a better world for us all, fulfilling the divine command to be creative, and to do *tikkun olam* (perfecting the world).

3. Some people believe there is good, or potential good, in all people and all things. Others see evil in the world and believe that some people and some things can be all evil and unredeemable. Ask the people around your table what they believe. Most Jewish thinkers and sources seem to believe the former.

