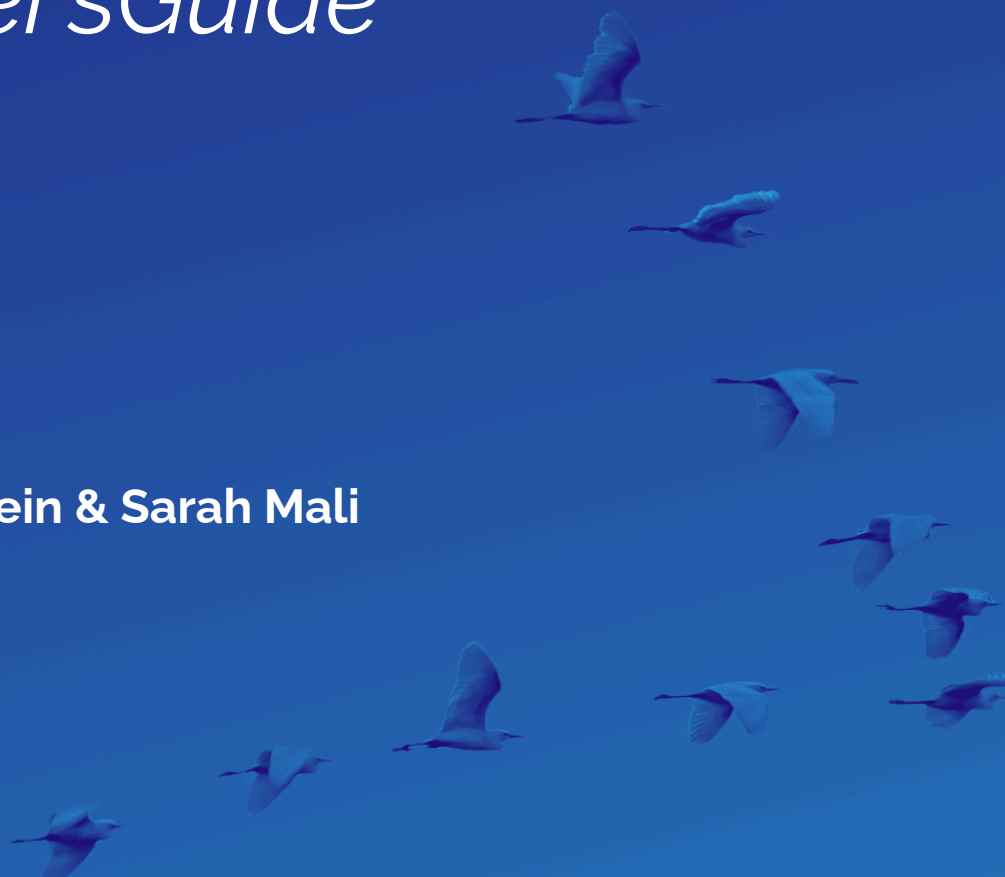


Unit 10

Have Faith in the Future: Vision, Purpose, & Hope *Learner's Guide*

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SYNOPSIS

Have Faith in the Future: Vision, Purpose, and Hope

Ultimately, leadership is about the future. We define leadership as helping to bridge the gap between the current state and the aspirational hope for the future. Leadership involves the capacity to dream, to hold onto hope, to see things not only as they are, but as what they might become.

The real task is to know what is the destination? That is the vision-driven leadership, which has characterized Judaism from the very beginning. From the moment that Abraham hears a call, “Lech lecha me’artzecha, umi’moladetecha umibeit avicha el ha’aretz asher ar’eka,” (Bereishit 12:1) to go to this unknown destination, to create a new kind of society – to Moshe Rabbeinu’s vision of the burning bush – we have been a people of visionaries.

Rabbi Sacks ([Vision-Driven Leadership in the 21st Century](#))

This unit aims to explore the question: How might we hold hope in a world that can oftentimes pull us to despair? What is required for us to stay clear on our purpose and vision for the future?

EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Learners will emerge from this session with the following enduring understandings:

1. Leadership requires us to be full of hope
2. Leadership work is, by definition, future-oriented and active. It requires that we stay in motion, evolving and growing, driven by the belief that to be human - to actualize our own humanity - means working to change our worlds (big and small) for the better.
3. Jewish leaders should strive to see themselves as partners with God, playing our part in the project of creating a just, vibrant, holy world.

INTRODUCTION

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever.

Steve Jobs (Commencement Speech at Stanford, 2005)

How have you become a person who cares enough to exert leadership and try to inspire change? What has led you to be hopeful, to believe that you can make a difference, to keep striving towards what is possible? We've each had our own path that led us to be in this experience together today – our own journey to this place. While this unit is very much focused on the future, we're going to begin by looking into each of our own pasts. How can you connect the dots of your leadership journey to make sense of why you are where you are today?

Corridor to Learning

Take 15 minutes to draw (give a pictorial representation of) the critical defining moments – that brought you to be in this room today - defining moments in your own leadership journey.

The caveats are:

- You may not use words in your pictorial depiction
- You may use every color marker
- Think about representing the events and people in your life that were important elements in your leadership journey

Reflection Questions

1. Get into groups of 3 or 4 and share your leadership journey maps with one another. Each person should have 3 minutes to share.
2. Then discuss: what were the common denominators that led each of you to want to step into leadership work? Then share these broad reflections with the large group.
3. As a large group, explore the role of purpose, vision, and hope in your journeys. How does connecting the dots of the past affect how you think about your leadership work in the future?

FRAMING

Practice both optimism and realism. Some people would have you choose one or the other. Believing in one or both is a choice. By holding on to them both, by being unwaveringly optimistic and coolly realistic at the same time, you keep that optimism from floating off into naivete and the realism from developing into cynicism.

Ronald A. Heifetz (The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, p. 296-297)

In our first unit, we made a distinction between leadership and authority; authority is a position held, while leadership is an activity. We encourage you to continue thinking about leadership as a verb - an action, a behavior - rather than a position. Leadership is an ongoing set of actions geared towards mobilizing yourself and others from the current state to a better, more whole, more ethical, more just, more alive, more beautiful and holy future state. Stepping into leadership requires that we stay hopeful, purposeful, and keep our eye clearly on the vision that makes the difficult work worthwhile.

"Leadership is vision-driven," Rabbi Sacks explains at the end of "Lessons in Leadership" in his Afterword: Seven Principles of Jewish Leadership. "Before Moses could lead, he experienced a vision at the burning bush. There he was told his task: to lead the people from slavery to freedom. He had a destination: the land flowing with milk and honey. He had a double challenge: to persuade the Egyptians to let the Israelites go, and to persuade the Israelites to take the risk of going." You too must develop and trust your ability to see in order to exert leadership. Leadership requires purpose - the indo-european root [pur] of which means fire - and vision - an ability to see beyond what is immediately before us. "Vision gives dignity to our aspirations," says Rabbi Sacks. "Leaders are led by their vision of the future, and it is this that inspires others."

In order to maintain your ability to see, you must remember to nurture and nourish yourself - with confidantes, your anchors, and in your sanctuaries - and develop the capacity to take care of yourself so that you can be of service to others.

We live in a world that is increasingly disturbing and complex. Before Covid-19, the world was described as VUCA: Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. The term served as a challenge to help us maintain meaning in the face of constant change. Yet, after the pandemic, even that term was deemed an insufficient descriptor to explain the challenges we are all facing, and a new term emerged: BANI, created by American anthropologist and futurist Jamais Cascio, which stands for Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible. While it is important to keep our eyes open and observe what is happening around us and be realistic about it, if we get stuck in the BANI space, we too might find ourselves succumbing to anxiety and incomprehension. It is hard to keep hopeful in the face of feeling like the world is teetering on its edge. We need to remember that, as Jews, we are part of a tradition of hope.

Somehow Jews have always had visionaries to lift the people from catastrophe to hope...we are the people who were never cured of our dreams

Rabbi Sacks (Lessons in Leadership, p. 306)

Great leadership requires vision, hopes, and dreams. Stay grounded in your faith that things can and will get better - when we push ourselves and others to be our best selves. Stay humble and hungry, vulnerable and courageous. And remember that you are not alone. You are a partner with God and the Jewish people to do good in the world.

We have been moved time and time again in our work by groups and individuals who are able to retain their optimism in the journey despite frustration and setbacks. How do they keep optimism alive? First, they take time to renew their faith that things do not have to be the way they are. They find ways to be reminded that, though they live in a complex environment with rich histories and pressures, different and better is possible....Second, they maintain the self-discipline to reflect on their efforts, when they work out and when they do not, as they engage. They expect to make mistakes and they give themselves permission to keep learning in action. And third, they stay alive to the opportunity to contribute - to add value to the lives of other people - every day.

Ronald A. Heifetz (The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, p. 297)

HEVRUTA LEARNING & REFLECTION

Find a learning partner, a Hevruta.

Spend 15 minutes reading and discussing each text cluster.

Text Cluster I

When Moses encounters God at the Burning Bush, Moses essentially asks God God's name. Who are you, Moses wants to know. How can I characterize you? How can I explain you to the people who won't trust me? God's answer, which can be translated as "I will be what I will be," is complex and unclear. We invite you to think about that answer in terms of leadership work. What does that idea - being what will be - bring up for you? How does it connect to maintaining hope, vision, and purpose?

Exodus 3:12-14

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה אֲנִי בֹא אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ לִי מִה־שָּׁמוֹ מָה אָמַר אֲלֵהֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:

Moses said to God, "When I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers' [house] has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is [God's] name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh," continuing, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'"

Krista Tippet (On Being with Krista Tippett, Avivah Zornberg: Human Becoming, Between Biblical Lines)

Christa Tippett: Let's talk about, also, the very mysterious name of God when Moses encounters God in the burning bush. He says: "Who should I tell them I saw?" And the name that comes back, now the way it's often translated in English, is: "I am who I am." I've also heard it translated: "I am becoming who I am becoming." How do you read what is said? And say it for me in Hebrew, as well, if you would?

Avivah Zornberg: It's "Ehyeh asher ehyeh," and literally, it just means "I will be who I will be." [...] God is not willing to allow himself to become in any way fetishized. And instead answers: I am the very principle of becoming, of allowing the possible to happen.

Aviva Zornberg (Moses, A Human Life, p. 41-42)

I will be what I will be (3:14)... God's identity is elusive; it holds transformation at its heart - a matter of becoming rather than being...God is a verb rather than a noun. As the God of becoming He sponsors the play of possibility. (Asking for God's name) Moses seeks stability, a clear social symbolic order. But what God implies is that the ordered is often the defensive: it is Pharaoh's constricted invention (meitzar), narrowing what can be understood of human life.

Rabbi Sacks, (Future Tense, published in The Jewish Chronicle on 4th April 2008)

Human beings are the only life form capable of using the future tense. Only beings who can imagine the world other than it is, are capable of freedom. And if we are free, the future is open, dependent on us. We can know the beginning of our story but not the end. That is why, as He is about to take the Israelites from slavery to freedom, God tells Moses that His name is 'I will be what I will be.' Judaism, the religion of freedom, is faith in the future tense.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you think Moses is really asking God at the Burning Bush? What does it mean to ask someone's name?
2. How do you make sense of God's response? What does Avivah Zornberg add to your understanding of "eheyeh asher eheyeh" - "I will be what I will be?"
3. What does it mean to you to have "faith in the future tense?" Who in your life inspired you to have hope in the future? What do you need to do to hold onto that hope?
4. God gives Himself a name - I will be what I will be - I am a divine in-becoming entity. If you had to give yourself a verb as a name - what would it be? Engage in your own sense of agency - move from the idea of a static and constrictive name to the possibilities of play for yourself.

Text Cluster II

Israel is the manifestation of the agency of the Jewish People in the world.

Many Jews who live in Israel do not engage in the larger narrative on a day to day basis, but rather speak the indigenous Hebrew language to one another, experience a collective national rest day in the form of the Sabbath on Saturday, and work to support the State's infrastructure and serve in the Israel Defence Forces to protect Israel from its enemies. This evolution is dynamic, it has no beginning, middle or end. It is our constant task. To borrow the theological identity of God: we are people in becoming - and Israel is our collective enterprise. But as Rabbi Sacks observes, this has never been easy and remains full of challenges. Our job is to stay hopeful, and to keep working towards a better future.

Deuteronomy 11:9-12

כִּי הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה בֹא־שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ לֹא כָאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הִוא אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאתֶם מִשָּׁם אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ וְהִשְׁקִיתָ בְּרִגְלְךָ כְּגֹן הַיָּרֵק: וְהָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ אֶרֶץ הָרִים וּבִקְעֹת לְמַטַּר הַשָּׁמַיִם תִּשְׁתָּה־מִּיָּם: אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ יִרְשָׁה אֹתָהּ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ מִרְשֵׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה:

For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come. There the grain you sowed had to be watered by your own labors, like a vegetable garden; but the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, soaks up its water from the rains of heaven.

It is a land which your God looks after, on which your God always keeps an eye, from year's beginning to year's end.

Rabbi Sacks (Future Tense, p. 137-140)

Israel is not the Nile delta or the Tigris-Euphrates valley. It is a land dependent on rain, and rain in that part of the world is not predictable. We knew this already: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all have to leave the land temporarily because of drought and famine... But the passage intimates a correlation between geography and spirituality. Israel is a place where people look to heaven in search of rain, not down to earth and its natural water up to supply. It is a place where you have to pray, not one in which nature and its seasons are predictable.

That is part of a larger narrative. Israel is not the Nile delta or the Tigris-Euphrates valley. It is a land dependent on rain, and rain in that part of the world is not predictable. We knew this already: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all have to leave the land temporarily because of drought and famine... But the passage intimates a correlation between geography and spirituality. Israel is a place where people look to heaven in search of rain, not down to earth and its natural water up to supply. It is a place where you have to pray, not one in which nature and its seasons are predictable. Because the terrain of Israel is such that it cannot become the base of an empire, it will constantly be at threat from larger and stronger neighboring powers. Israel will always find itself outnumbered. It will need to rely on exceptional courage from its soldiers, and ingenuity in battle. That will take high national morale, which in turn will require from the people a sense of belonging to a just and inclusive society. Commitment will be needed from every individual.

Kamenetzky, Jacob Arranger, and Naphtali Herz Imbel. (Hatikvah, 1907)

*As long as within our hearts
The Jewish soul sings,
As long as forward to the East,
To Zion, looks the eye –
Our hope is not yet lost,
It is two thousand years old,
To be a free people in our land
The land of Zion and Jerusalem*

כָּל עוֹד בְּלִבֵּב פְּנִימָה
נֶפֶשׁ יְהוּדֵי הוֹמִיָּה
וּלְפָאֲתֵי מִזְרַח קְדִימָה
עֵין לְצִיּוֹן צוֹפִיָּה
עוֹד לֹא אֶבְדָּה תְּקוּמָתָהּ
הַתְּקוּהָ בֶּת שְׁנוֹת אֲלָפִים
לְהִיּוֹת עַם חֶפְשִׁי בְּאֶרְצָנוּ
אֶרֶץ צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם

Reflection Questions

1. How do all the limitations of the land of Israel give an imperative to the people of Israel? How do they need to respond to these restrictions according to Sacks?
2. If the onus is on the actions of all the people of Israel to create a thriving and safe society - how might you understand the idea of Israel's national anthem being called Hatikvah - the hope?
3. What actions have you taken to build Israel recently, personally, spiritually and possibly within Israel herself?
4. What role does Israel play in your leadership work? How does it factor into your understanding of the leadership work of the Jewish people in the world?



Jewish Federation
of Greater Atlanta

INTEGRATION & PRACTICE

Leadership Exercise

Future Vision Circles

In groups of three, respond to the prompt:

It's [exactly one year later than today] and it's been an incredible year.

Your only job is to respond to the prompt. You can share things from a personal lens, a professional lens, a leadership lens, a national lens, etc. Each person will respond to the prompt 3 times, sharing their vision for the future with new people in the circle each time.

Closing Circle

- Spend a few minutes writing down a declaration based on your vision circle work.
- What will you commit to doing to help make it the year you just described?

TAKE-AWAY EXERCISE

This curriculum has strived to be a resource that can give you each the freedom to construct yourself from wisdom, love, debris. Constructing – reconstructing – are VERBS: see the SELF as a VERB too – ongoing integrative work refashioning what is essential and what is expendable.

Watch this short video from Rabbi Sacks: rabbisacks.info/optimismvshope Feb 2, 2001
TRANSCRIPT:

“People often confuse optimism and hope. They sound similar. But in fact, they're very different. Optimism is the belief that things are going to get better. Hope is the belief that if we work hard enough together, we can make things better. It needs no courage, just a certain naivety to be an optimist. It needs a great deal of courage to have hope. No Jew, knowing what we do about history and our own past so often written in tears, can be an optimist. But no Jew, who is a true Jew, can ever give up hope. And that is why Judaism is for me the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind. And hope is what transforms the human situation.”

Rabbi Sacks (Optimism vs. Hope, JInsider March 2010)

REMEMBER:

1. Find out the reality on the ground: what are the gains and losses of change? What do you hold dear and what do you need to wrestle with? What is your leadership challenge?
2. You have many narratives that make you up, try to stay open to all of them and not let one take over.
3. Lead from the inside out – listen to the “other” in you – it will help you value the diversity in others.
4. When you are faced with ambiguity and you feel like you may be going into unknown territory hold steady – connect with your purpose.
5. Recognize that change implies loss. Be prepared to help yourself & others deal with it.
6. Leadership alone is tough. Find helpers. People who can trust to push you to a place where you can grow.
7. Be generous to yourself
8. Stay hopeful: be, as Rabbi Sacks says, an “agent of hope in a world serially threatened by despair.”

UNIT LESSON SUMMARY:

Leadership requires vision, purpose, and hope. This is a profound Jewish value.