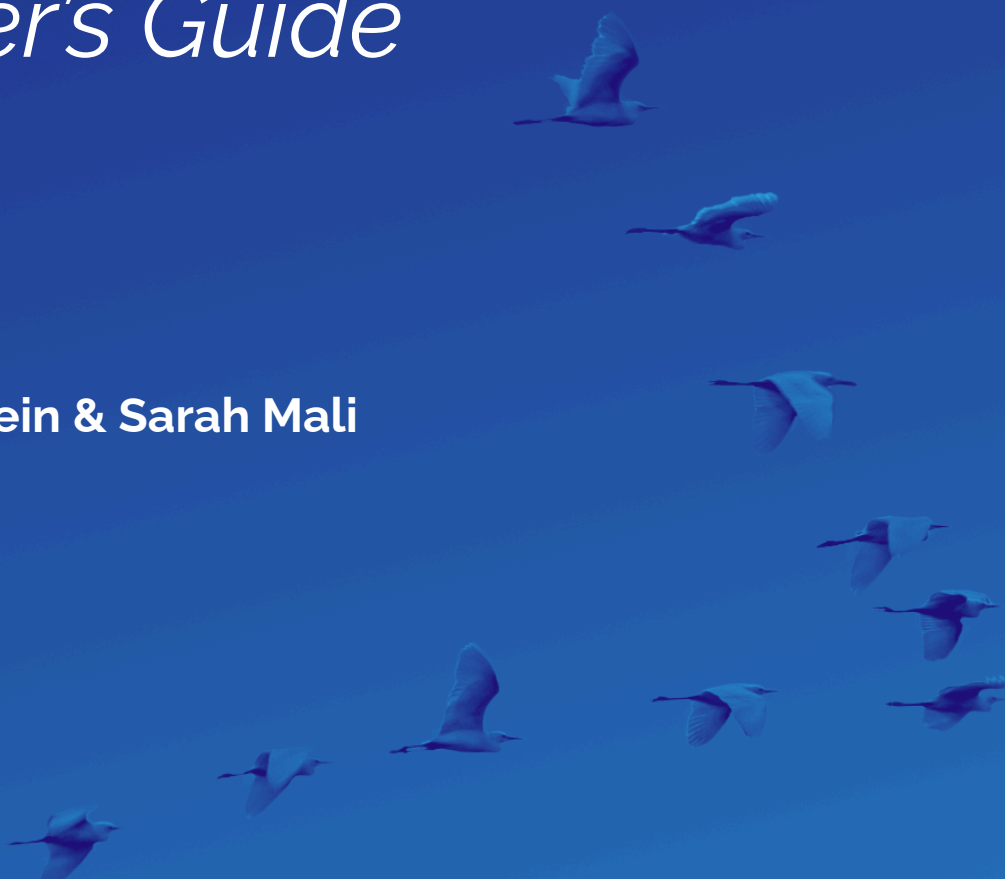


Unit 5

Taking Risks & Anchoring Self *Learner's Guide*

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SYNOPSIS

Taking Risks

If leadership is so risky, why bother? This session draws upon textual and leadership learnings that encourage us to connect to our purpose when engaging in leadership, understand the risks we inevitably take when exerting leadership, and learn to anchor ourselves so we can be more resilient in exercising leadership for the common Jewish good.

***The ability to survive and to recover is part of what it takes to be a leader.
It is the willingness to live a life of risks that makes such individuals
different from others.***

Rabbi Sacks (Lessons in Leadership, p. 33)

This unit aims to explore the questions: When is it worth it to step into leadership work? How do we know? How do we choose? And, once we've entered the risky territory of leadership work, how do we protect ourselves so that we can make progress?

EDUCATIONAL GOALS

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

- Purpose must be at the heart of any leadership endeavor; one must be clear on why one is choosing to step into the fray
- Leadership work invariably involves risk. That is one of the hallmarks of the work.
- It is as important to cultivate the tools to manage one's self as it is to manage the issue.
- We need to build our own capacity to know ourselves and care for ourselves if we are to be successful in tackling leadership challenges.

INTRODUCTION

In this session, we will explore the elements involved in stepping into the fray of leadership. If leadership is an activity in which anyone can engage, then leadership is always a choice. Sometimes, when we feel called to leadership, we feel that the choice is choosing us; this is usually an indication that the leadership work is deeply aligned with our passion and purpose. But each time we step into leadership, we are making an active choice, and that choice invariably involves risk. We will discuss the risk-benefits of leadership work, and ways in which we can begin to think about mitigating the risks.

Judaism is a religion of doing, and what we do together is greater than any of us could do alone. That is the challenge of leadership...daring greatly makes us great. There is no other way.

Rabbi Sacks (Lessons in Leadership, xxviii)

Corridor to Learning

From Ronald A. Heifetz (The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World, p. 236)

Purpose:

The only reason to step into the unknown is because you care deeply enough about the issue to take a risk. As we will see, just as Abraham had a clear sense of purpose that motivated him to be different and smash his father's idols and leave his home, so too do we have our purpose that can inspire us to take risks.

Think about a leadership challenge you are tackling. Can you articulate its purpose?

In the below chart, list the things you're currently doing to achieve that purpose; new things you might try that are bolder than what you are doing now, and, finally, things that seem outrageous and risky.

Discuss with a partner what things in the second column you might try, and whether or not there is anything you might even try from the third column.

Things I'm Doing Now	New Things I Might Do	Things I'd Never Do

Reflection Questions:

- What did you notice about yourself in this exercise? Did you surprise yourself?
- What did you notice about the group in this exercise? Did anyone surprise you?
- Did it feel risky to stand anywhere at any point? Why? How did you handle it?
- What did this exercise teach you about being "anchored" vs "taking risks?"
- Re-connect to your purpose around a leadership challenge. Where do you stand, right now, vis a vis that challenge? What would it look like to move along the spectrum of that challenge, to take some risk around the issue?

We must also be mindful of how much frustration, discomfort, and newness people are willing to tolerate. Change is slow, it must take time. There are risks involved in avoiding the work of leadership - risks of perpetuating the status quo; and there are risks involved in pushing people to change too quickly.

This theory of leadership posits that evolution is a more effective and lasting way to make change than revolution. Lasting, systemic change, that involves changing the hearts, minds, and behaviors of groups of people, cannot happen in one fell swoop. It requires tremendous patience and time. It also requires managing people's fears of perceived losses, and helping them through actual losses during the change process. It is crucial to ask: if we are successful in achieving our desired purpose, who will lose something? How can we hold their hands through this loss so that they are able to tolerate the change?

When Abraham is called to leave his home and go on a journey towards the unknown, he is being asked to risk his entire life for something he does not understand and cannot envision. Yet, he knows that the current state is not true to his essence, and he has a deep moral sense that he, and others around him, can be living differently. Abraham is a powerful example of a risk-taker for the sake of a larger purpose, and the ways in which he navigates risk is inspiring and illuminating.

HEVRUTA LEARNING & REFLECTION

Find a learning partner, a Hevruta.

Spend 15 minutes reading and discussing each text cluster.

Text Cluster I

Genesis 12:1-2

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָדָּ:

The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

וְאָעֲשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְהָ שְׁמִי וְהָיָה בְרָכָה:

I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing.

Rashi on Genesis 12:1-2

ואעשך לגוי גדול. לפי שהדרך גורמת לשלשה דברים, ממעטת פריה ורביה וממעטת את הממון וממעטת את השם, לכך הזקק לשלשה ברכות הללו, שהבטיחו על הבנים ועל הממון ועל השם:

גדול AND I WILL MAKE OF THEE A GREAT NATION —Since traveling is the cause of three things—it decreases (breaks up) family life, it reduces one's wealth and lessens one's renown, he therefore needed these three blessings: that God should promise him children, wealth and a great name (Genesis Rabbah 39:11).

Radak on Genesis 12:1:2

(א) מארצך, כי קשה לאדם לצאת מארצו אשר גר שם ימים רבים כל שכן אם נולד שם,

"From your land" G-d had to add this as it is difficult for a person to leave a homeland in which he had dwelled for many years, all the more so if that land was at the same time the place where he had been born.

(א) זהו שאמר וממולדתך, כל שכן שיניח בית אביו ומשפחתו וילך לו אל ארץ לא ידע תמול שלשום זהו שאמר מבית אביו.

This is why G-d added: from your father's house, since it is doubly difficult to separate from one's family also and to go to a country where one knows no one. This is the meaning of מבית אביו, "away from your father's house."

Rabbi Sacks, (Vayera 5780: Negative Capability, Covenant & Conversation 5780, p. 5)

Abraham was learning that there is a long and winding road between promise and fulfillment. Not because God does not keep His word, but because Abraham and his descendants were charged with bringing something new into the world [...]

The poet John Keats, in a letter to his brothers George and Thomas in 1817, sought to define what made Shakespeare so great compared to other writers. He possessed, he said, "Negative Capability – that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." Shakespeare, in other words, was open to life in all its multiplicity and complexity, its conflicts and contradictions [...]

I believe that Abraham taught us that faith is not certainty; it is the courage to live with uncertainty. He had negative capability. He knew the promises would come true; he could live with the uncertainty of not knowing how or when.

Reflection Questions:

- One can read this text as a call to leadership: God is commanding Avram to step into leadership. And the first learning is that this will involve loss, and risk - loss of one's "native land," of one's "father's house," for the sake of a vision, a purpose, a dream, that is aspirational, but not definite. Why do you think that leadership inevitably involves loss and risk? What is at risk here for Avram?
- How do Rashi and Radak's commentaries enhance your understanding of the risks and benefits involved in this leadership challenge that Avram faces? What does that teach you about the nature of risks and benefits in leadership work in general?
- Rabbi Sacks quotes Keats' term "Negative Capability:" the ability to sit in the unknown. How does Avram model negative capability in this story? Have you ever been in a state of "negative capability?" What was it like?
- There is a concept that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. How does that idea fit here, and what does it teach you about the work of leadership?

Text Cluster II

Bereshit Rabba 38

Rabbi Hiyya said: Terach was a manufacturer of idols. He once went away somewhere and left Abraham to sell them in his place. A man came in and wished to buy one. "How old are you?" Abraham asked the man. "Fifty years old," he said. "Woe to such a man, who is fifty years old and would worship a day old object!" Avraham said. He was embarrassed and went on his way. On another occasion a woman came in with a plateful of flour and requested him, "Take this and offer it to them." So he took a stick and broke them, and put the stick in the hand of the largest. When his father returned he demanded, "What have you done to them?"

רבי חייא בר ברין אבא דרבי אבהו, תרח עובד צלמים היה, חד זמן נפיק לאתר, הושיב לאברהם מוכר תחתיו. הוה אתי בר אינש בעי דין, והוה אמר לה בר כמה שנין את, והוה אמר ליה בר חמשין או שתין, והוה אמר ליה וי ליה להווא גברא דהוה בר שתין ובעי למסגד לבר יומי, והוה מתביש והולך לו. חד זמן אתא חד אתתא טעינא בידה חדא פינד דסלת, אמרה ליה הא לך קרב קדמיהון, קם נסיב בוקלסא בידיה, ותברינון לכלהון פסיליא, ויהב בוקלסא בידי דרבה דהוה ביניהון. כיון דאתא אבהו אמר ליה מאן עבד להון כדן

Rabbi Yitzchak said: this may be compared to a man who was traveling from place to place when he saw a castle aglow. He said, "Is it possible that this castle lacks a person to look after it?" The owner of the building looked at him and said to him, 'I am the master of the castle.' What happened with Abraham our father was similar. He said, "Is it possible that this universe lacks a person to look after it?," the Holy Blessed One looked at him and said to him, 'I am the Master of the Universe.'

אמר רבי יצחק משל לאחד שהיה עובר ממקום למקום, וראה בירה אחת דולקת, אמר תאמר שהבירה הזו בלא מנהיג, הציץ עליו בעל הבירה, אמר לו אני הוא בעל הבירה.

Rabbi Berekhyah said: to what was Abraham our father similar? to a flask of balsam-tree juice close with a tight lid, placed in a corner and its fragrance was not emitted. When it was moved, its fragrance was emitted. Thus the Holy Blessed One said to Abraham our Father, move yourself from place to place and your name will become great in the world....

אמר רבי ברכיה למה היה אברהם אבינו דומה, לצלוחית של אפופילסימון מקפת צמיד פתיל, ומנחת בזוית, ולא היה ריחו נודף, כיון שהיתה מטלטלת היה ריחו נודף. כך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לאברהם אבינו טלטל עצמך ממקום למקום ושםך מתגדל בעולם.

Rabbi Sacks (Lessons in Leadership, p. 3)

Why? Because he was prepared to be different. As the sages say, he was called ha'ivri, "the Hebrew," because "all the world was on one side (be'ever ehad) and he was on the other." Leadership, as every leader knows, can be lonely. Yet you continue to do what you have to do because you know that the majority is not always right and conventional wisdom is not always wise. Dead fish go with the flow. Live fish swim against the current. So it is with conscience and courage. So it is with the children of Abraham. They are prepared to challenge the idols of the age.

Reflection Questions:

- The Midrash recounts the story that Avram's father sold idols, and that when Avram manned the shop, he wasn't the best salesman...how does this story enhance your picture of Abraham and the qualities involved in leadership? We have been discussing the relationship between risk and leadership: what risks does Avram take?
- The Midrash also reveals that Abraham thinks for himself, and thinks differently from those around him. The metaphor of his fragrance being emitted only when he "moved" hints that change and growth necessitates movement, an ability to move beyond the status quo to what might be. Have you ever thought differently from those around you? What was it like?
- Rabbi Sacks talks about the importance of being willing to "challenge the idols of the age." What "idols" do you believe are holding us back, as a Jewish people, and as a human community? What idols might you be willing to challenge for the sake of growth and progress?

INTEGRATION & PRACTICE

Being a leader who challenges the prevailing consensus is not easy. It requires courage, conviction, and commitment. It also involves taking risks and facing uncertainty. Sometimes, we might feel alone or misunderstood in our quest for change. That is why it is important to take care of ourselves and our well-being. In the following section, we will explore some strategies and tips for self-care and community care, as well as some resources and support networks that can help us in our leadership journey.

Leadership work often involves modeling to others the process of change. We must build our own capabilities for taking risks, learning new behaviors and ways of thinking, and stepping outside our comfort zones. We have found that in order to do this, people involved in leadership work need the following anchors to sustain themselves:

Sanctuary: Find spaces that nurture and re-charge you. Spend time in those places. This is not a “luxury.” It is crucial for your well-being and ability to hold others through the fray.

Daily Practices: In times of stress, we fall back on our habits. Good leaders need good habits. Forge healthy habits in times that are less intense, and fall back on them when challenges arise.

Ground Yourself in Purpose: Remember why you are choosing to do this difficult work. Remind others why this work matters. When things get tough, lean on purpose.

Anchor Yourself with Confidantes: Confidantes are people who care more about you than about the issue. It is crucial to have people in your life you can share with, who can hold you and support you no matter what.

- What anchors you when you feel overwhelmed?
- What is your Sanctuary? What are your Daily Practices?
What is your Purpose? And who are your Confidantes?

TAKE-AWAY EXERCISE

"I want you, says God to Abraham, to be different. Not for the sake of being different, but for the sake of starting something new: a religion that will not worship power and the symbols of power -- for that is what idols really were and are. I want you, says God, to "teach his children and his descendants to keep the way of the Holy One, by doing what is just and right" (Gen. 18:19).

Rabbi Sacks, The courage not to conform.
Covenant & Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible.

- **Choose something** - big or small - that you are willing to take a risk for.
- **Think of three small acts** you can do to make leadership progress on this issue. Commit to trying those acts within the next month.

UNIT LESSON SUMMARY:

Leadership is risky work. Our leadership must be deeply grounded in meaningful purpose, and we must care for ourselves as we lead.