



# COVENANT & CONVERSATION

## Family Edition

תצוה תשע"ט  
Tetzaveh 5779

### Brothers: A Drama in Five Acts

#### WELCOME TO COVENANT & CONVERSATION 5779 FAMILY EDITION

*Covenant & Conversation: Family Edition* is a new and exciting initiative from The Office of Rabbi Sacks for 5779. Written as an accompaniment to Rabbi Sacks' weekly *Covenant & Conversation* essay, the *Family Edition* is aimed at connecting older children and teenagers with his ideas and thoughts on the *parsha*. To receive this via email please make sure you are subscribed to Rabbi Sacks' main mailing list at [www.RabbiSacks.org/Subscribe](http://www.RabbiSacks.org/Subscribe).



#### PARSHAT TETZAVEH IN A NUTSHELL

In *Tetzaveh*, the role of the priests in the service of the Tabernacle takes centre stage. For once the limelight is no longer turned on Moses, but on his brother Aaron, the

High Priest. We read about the tasks of the priesthood, their robes of office and their consecration, as well as further details about the Tabernacle itself.



#### THE CORE IDEA

*Tetzaveh* is the only *parsha* where the name of Moses is not mentioned at all since the first *parsha* of the book of Shemot (in which he is born). Here, just this once, Moses, our hero, the leader, the liberator, the lawgiver, is off-stage. Instead our focus is on his elder brother Aaron who, elsewhere, is often in the background. Indeed, virtually the whole *parsha* is devoted to the role Moses did *not* occupy, – that of Priest in general, High Priest in particular.

The question is, why is Moses removed from the passage entirely? The commentators offered various suggestions. One given in the Talmud refers to an event at the beginning of Moses' leadership: his encounter with God at the burning bush. Moses repeatedly expressed reluctance to undertake the mission of leading the people out of Egypt. Finally we read: But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and He said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do." (Exodus 4:13-15)

There is a debate in the Talmud about the lasting impact of that moment when Moses, as it were, refused one time

too many. To turn down the challenge of leadership once or twice is a sign of humility. To continue to do so, especially when it is God issuing the challenge, may bring about God's anger, as happened here. According to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the Talmud, the lasting effect of Moses' reluctance to lead was that one vital leadership role – priesthood – was eventually granted to Aaron rather than to Moses himself. Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (1270-1340) suggests that Moses' name is missing from *Tetzaveh*, which deals with the priestly garments, "to spare him distress" upon seeing Aaron acquire the uniform of priesthood that might have been Moses' own.

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. Do you think Moses' name was removed from this *parsha* for his benefit, or for Aaron's benefit?
2. Who do you think is more likely to be jealous of his brother, Aaron or Moses?
3. Do you have siblings? Are you sometimes jealous of them or they of you? Why do you think this is?



## IT ONCE HAPPENED...

The day the Nazis liquidated the ghetto of Piotrków, the Rabbi of the Polish town, Reb Moshe Chaim Lau, grabbed his eldest son Tulek, looked him in the eye with burning passion and love, and said, “You are the eldest of the children. It is your responsibility to ensure they continue to follow in our ways.” Tulek knew exactly what he meant. “Take special care of Lulek,” his father implored. Tulek believed his father had deep faith that Lulek, the youngest of the family, then aged just 7, would somehow survive and continue the legacy of the family. Finally he added, “If you come safely through this hell, you will know how to find your home. Not here, not on any alien hostile soil. Your home is Eretz Yisrael.” This mission gave Tulek an amazing drive to survive. His father’s words gave him extraordinary strength beyond what could possibly have been expected, himself just a boy aged 16.

As the Nazis forced the men and women into two separate lines, Lulek held on to his mother tightly. But she understood that he had a greater chance of survival if he was with the men, so she pushed him away from her into the arms of Tulek. Tulek emptied the bag he had with him, wrapped Lulek in a blanket, and placed him in the bag. Their parents were sent directly to Treblinka and perished on that day. Tulek was sent to Buchenwald with Lulek hidden on his back.

Time and time again Tulek gambled his life to save his younger brother, all the while fighting to survive himself. In the Czestochowa labour camp he bribed a German officer with a diamond hidden in his teeth to buy Lulek’s life, and again in Buchenwald with his father’s gold watch,

hidden in his shoe. This was the last of his resources and after this he had to rely on his wits alone.

As the Allied forces closed in, the Jewish inmates were deported on a train, but Lulek, in hiding, remained in the camp. Tulek managed to jump from the train with two other survivors. “Where do we head now” they ask. “Back to Buchenwald,” Tulek answered, “I have to go back for the child!”

On 11<sup>th</sup> April 1945, Buchenwald was liberated by American troops. Against all odds, and against all reason, the two brothers had survived, and after travelling through Europe, they found their way on to a Jewish Agency “illegal immigrant” ship headed for Palestine. They arrived in pre-state Israel in July 1945, less than three years after Tulek had taken his oath to their father, the Rabbi of Piotrkow.

This story has a postscript. Almost fifty years later, the two brothers stood side by side at the Kotel. The elder brother, Naftali Lau-Lavie, himself a dedicated public servant of many years, beamed with pride as his little brother, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, was inaugurated as the beloved Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel.

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. Are there any similarities between these two brothers and the brothers in our *parsha* (Moses and Aaron)?
2. Do you think the love between these siblings is normal, or something beyond the everyday?



## THINKING MORE DEEPLY

One of the recurring themes of Genesis is sibling rivalry, hostility between brothers. This story is told four times: between Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers.

There is a noticeable pattern to this set of narratives, best seen in the way each story ends. The tale of Cain and Abel ends with murder – fratricide (killing a sibling). Isaac and Ishmael, though they grow up apart, are together at Abraham’s funeral. Evidently there has been a reconciliation between them. Jacob and Esau meet, embrace and go their separate ways. Joseph and his brothers are reconciled and live together in peace, Joseph providing them with food, land, and protection.

Genesis is telling us a story of great consequence. Fraternity – one of the key words of the French revolution – is not simple

or straightforward. It is often fraught with conflict and contention. Yet slowly, brothers can learn that there is another way. On this note Genesis ends. But it is not the end of the story.

The drama has a fifth act: the relationship between Moses and Aaron. Here, for the first time, there is no hint of sibling rivalry. The brothers work together from the very outset of their mission to lead the Israelites to freedom. They address the people together. They stand united when confronting Pharaoh. They perform signs and wonders together. They share leadership of the people in the wilderness. At last, we see two brothers functioning as a team, with different gifts, different talents, different roles, but without hostility, each complementing the other.

Their partnership is a constant feature of the narrative. But there are certain moments where it is particularly noteworthy. The first occurs in the passage already cited above. God tells Moses that Aaron “is already on his way to meet you, and *his heart will be glad when he sees you.*” How different this is from the tense encounters between brothers in Genesis!

Aaron, we may have thought, might have many reasons not to rejoice on seeing Moses return. The brothers had not grown up together. Moses had been adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter and raised in an Egyptian palace, while Aaron remained with the Israelites. Nor had they been together during the Israelites’ sufferings. Moses, fearing for his life after his assault on an Egyptian taskmaster, had fled to Midian.

Besides this, Moses was Aaron’s younger brother, and yet it was he who was about to become the leader of the people. Always in the past, when the younger had taken something the elder might have believed belonged naturally to him, there was jealousy, animosity. Yet God assures Moses: “when Aaron sees you, he will rejoice.”

The second fascinating clue is contained in a strange passage that traces the descent of Moses and Aaron: “Amram married his father’s sister Yocheved, who bore him Aaron and Moses... *It was this same Aaron and Moses* to whom the Lord

said, “Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.” They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. *It was this same Moses and Aaron.* (Exodus 6:20, 26-27). Why the repeated phrase, “It was this same”? There are two other peculiarities in the phrases. The first is that the names of the brothers are placed in a different order: the first says “Aaron and Moses,” the second, “Moses and Aaron.” Even stranger is the grammatical oddity of the phrase. Both times, the third person singular is used, literally translating to: “He was Aaron and Moses”, “He was Moses and Aaron.” The text should have said, “They” – all the more so since the pronoun “they” is used in the middle of the passage: “They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh.” The unmistakable implication is that they were like a single individual; they were as one. There was no hierarchy between them: sometimes Aaron appears first, sometimes Moses.

It was precisely the fact that Aaron did not envy his younger brother but instead rejoiced in his greatness that made him worthy to be High Priest. So it came to pass – measure for measure – that just as Aaron made space for his younger brother to lead, so the Torah makes space for Aaron to lead. That is why Aaron is the hero of *Tetzaveh*: for once, not overshadowed by Moses.



## FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

Judaism, Christianity and Islam have been locked in a violent, sometimes fatal embrace for so long. Their relationship is sibling rivalry, fraught with mimetic desire: the desire for the same thing, Abraham’s promise.

... At the heart of all three faiths is the idea that within humanity there is one privileged position – one favoured son, a chosen people, guardian of the truth, gatekeeper of salvation – for which more than one candidate competes. The result is conflict of the most existential kind, for what is at stake is the most precious gift of all: God’s paternal love. One group’s victory means another’s defeat, and

since this is a humiliation, a dethronement, it leads to revenge. So the strife is perpetuated.

*Not in God’s Name, p.98-99*

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. Do you think we can learn from the sibling rivalries in the Torah to help us understand the world?
2. Do you think God has favourites? Is it possible God loves all nations and people equally?



## AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Why do you think Moses was so desperate to have Aaron help him with this task?
2. Do you think Moses was left out of this week’s *parsha* as a punishment, for his own sake, or for the sake of his brother Aaron?
3. Is it more natural to have a sibling relationship like those characters from the Book of Bereishit, or like Moses and Aaron’s?
4. Is the relationship with your siblings more like those in the Book of Bereishit or like that of Moses and Aaron?
5. Would you say that the sibling relationship between Moses and Aaron is the ideal to strive for? Is it realistic?



## QUESTION TIME

Do you want to win a **Koren Aviv Weekday Siddur**? Email [CCFamilyEdition@rabbisacks.org](mailto:CCFamilyEdition@rabbisacks.org) with your name, age, city and your best question or observation about the *parsha* from the *Covenant & Conversation Family Edition*. **Entrants must be 18 or younger**. Thank you to Koren Publishers for kindly donating these wonderful siddurim.



## EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS

### THE CORE IDEA

1. According to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the Talmud, this was a punishment because Moses refused to trust God and accept the leadership role he was being offered. The punishment, it could be argued, was a lesson to Moses, and therefore for his benefit. However, Rabbi Jacob ben Asher takes a different approach, and is of the opinion that this signified a sensitivity to Moses who could have qualified for the priesthood himself, and therefore could have been distressed to witness Aaron receiving the uniform of priesthood. So God disassociated him from the *parsha* where this is discussed. Finally, perhaps we can argue that this was for the sake of Aaron, so he could have his moment in the limelight, when the Torah discusses his spiritual leadership role. The Torah wishes not to overshadow Aaron at this moment by mentioning his younger brother, who has a larger role.
2. We often feel that those around who seem so confident and have such strong self-esteem couldn't possibly have doubt in themselves. It is therefore a shock to learn that even the strongest personalities, who have achieved so much, also struggle with the very human emotions of jealousy and self-doubt. It would be reasonable to assume that Aaron was jealous of Moses, even though we see no evidence of that in the Torah. It is also feasible that Moses could likewise have had some envious thoughts towards his elder brother, the High Priest.
3. Sibling rivalry is the most natural emotion and exists in all families. Much has been written on this. On the simplest level, the rivalry is about the love available in the family. We must remind ourselves that love is not a zero-sum game, where if a parent loves one child, it means s/he cannot love a second child just the same.

### IT ONCE HAPPENED...

1. Moses and Aaron have only love and respect for each other, in contrast to the complex sibling relationships we see in the Book of Genesis (see *Thinking More Deeply* for a more in-depth presentation of this idea). Despite Aaron's seniority, there is no evidence to suggest that he is jealous or bitter towards his younger brother Moses, in his leadership role. So too in this moving story of the Lau brothers, there is only deep and mutual love, and Naftali only feels pride and love when his younger brother becomes Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel.
2. While brotherly love is a natural and beautiful thing that exists everywhere, this particular story is quite extraordinary, taking place as it does during exceptional times. While all people would hope to be able to go to these lengths to save their sibling, this is a particularly inspiring and remarkable story.

### FROM THE THOUGHT OF RABBI SACKS

1. Rabbi Sacks suggests in *Not in God's Name* that we can understand the tension between Judaism and its daughter religions (Christianity and Islam) through the prism of sibling rivalry, and this can be learned from the strained relationships between Isaac and Ishmael, and between Jacob and Esau. In the *Covenant & Conversation* he also suggests that all the sibling relationships in the Book of Genesis are models for our own relationships. Each one complex and at times difficult, yet each one came to reconciliation in the end. The ultimate sibling relationship is between Moses and Aaron which displayed no tensions and only love. This is the ideal to strive for.
2. Rabbi Sacks believes that God loves all His creations, which includes all people and all peoples. Just as a parent can love many children equally, so can God.

### AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. At this stage Moses lacked confidence in his abilities, despite God's assurances. Perhaps he also felt that it was only right that there would be a role for his elder brother.
2. See *The Core Idea*, answer 1.
3. All models of the sibling relationship are natural, including the models we find in the Book of Genesis, which are often fraught with tension and rivalry. However, this does not mean we should not strive for the ideal that Moses and Aaron model for us.
4. This is a personal question. When considering it, encourage the participants in the discussion to be honest, and remind them that as mentioned in answer 3, sibling rivalries are natural and common.
5. We believe the Torah presents us with realistic models, including their flaws (the Torah presents both Moses and Aaron in an authentic light including their flaws and mistakes) who represent ideals that are worth striving for, and are realistically achievable.