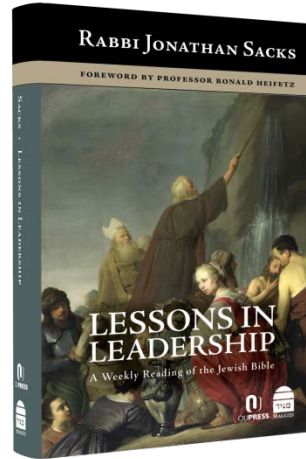


Reviews by Amos Lassen

Books, Movies and Judaica and Random Thoughts About Whatever

“Lessons in Leadership: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible” by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks—
Power, Authority and Leadership



Sacks, Jonathan Rabbi. “Lessons in Leadership: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible”, Maggid, 2015.

Power, Authority and Leadership

Amos Lassen

This is the companion volume the series “Covenant & Conversation” by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks in which he looks at the weekly Torah portions for insights into the nature of power, authority, and leadership. We begin with the premise that no man is born a leader and then let the Torah explore the principles, and perils, of becoming one. Lessons in Leadership reveals the biblical secrets of influence, and they are as relevant now as they were three thousand years ago.

It is important to remember that the Bible was written by people who over three thousand years ago struggled with finding better ways to organize socially especially as they moved from a nomadic society to small communities and then ultimately to larger ones. We are aware how,

when going down to Egypt, that the country was already an empire and it was then that Moses and others established the norms of governance for those who had been part of Egypt and who left her with her vices and then began to build something new.

Rabbi Saks looks at the principles of leadership in the Bible as well as the structures of authority and he shows how the struggles that we face today can use the guidance of those who came before us. We seem to have a strong will to refer back to dependency on authority when times are not good and we are unable to solve certain problems. Rabbi Sacks also gives us insight into leadership: he shows how an individual whose has been granted authority (either human or divine or both) can develop and maintain the self-discipline to develop collective capacity. In the bible we saw how the culture of dependency can change a culture and how a people that had been enslaved for a long period becomes a society in which the members were called upon to take responsibility. It is, as Sacks, says the way to become partners in the “ongoing work of creation”.

It is necessary to understand the difference between leadership as a practice and a calling to all of us to take part while the structures of governance and authority specify the roles we are to take. There are those that lead from a position of authority and there are those who lead without such a position.

In order to survive and continue in a world that is constantly changing, we need to learn about the evolution in our cultures that will allow for the knowledge, wisdom, critical thinking and innovation. Rabbi Sacks show us how the lessons of those who came before us are part of our collective memory and this can indeed help us meet the challenges of leadership and authority. We can find the beginnings of answers to the major questions of authority and leadership in the Five Books of Moses but it is up to us to continue to add to those answers.

We share a partnership with God that goes both ways and therefore the plan of God can be changed by dialogue. It is necessary to learn to listen and when we do so God listens as well. If God, the ultimate authority listens and learns so can we. Here we learn of both divine and human authority but the point is that we can. Leadership is important but it is not an end-all.