

At the heart of what it means to be a Jew is to ask questions.

Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso



RABBI SANDY EISENBERG SASSO was the first woman ordained by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (in 1974). She is rabbi emerita of Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis, where she served as rabbi for thirty-six years. Rabbi Sasso is an award-winning author of numerous children's books and winner of a National Jewish Book Award. She lectures in religion and Judaism at Butler University and Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. Rabbi Sasso is active in the arts, civic, and interfaith communities. She has written and lectured on women and spirituality and the discovery of the religious imagination in children.

VOICES

Commentary by RABBI SANDY EISENBERG SASSO

When we are young, we are filled with curiosity, always wanting to know why, and never content with a single explanation. We are not afraid of hard questions, until later in life when people try to convince us to stop asking.

To be a Jew is never to accept "I told you so" as a satisfactory answer. To be a Jew means to live with complexity, to prefer the question mark to the period. God asks Adam, "Where are you?" Cain questions God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Abraham challenges God, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do justly?" The ancient rabbis always ask of the biblical text: What's missing? What's troubling? What does it mean to me? Each question spawns another, and what results is a patchwork of profound creativity.

There is an insightful truth about Judaism contained in the many humorous stories that suggest if there are two Jews, there are three opinions, that one Jew requires two synagogues, that Jews tend to answer a question with another question.

In a world where people are dangerously preoccupied with certainty and dogma, Judaism embraces ambiguity and doubt. A young person once asked me whether Judaism gave me all the answers to my questions. I responded, "Judaism helps me to ask the right questions and to live with the questions for which there are no answers."

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JAMES STEINBERG is an illustrator whose works grace book covers, CD covers, magazines, annual reports, and websites. Steinberg studied at the Rhode Island School of Design, and has often appeared in the *Communication Arts*, *American Illustration*, *Society of Illustrators*, and *Print* regional design annuals. His extensive client list includes the U.S. Postal Service, Polygram Records, Strathmore Paper, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, *Time*, *The New York Times*, and *Fortune*.



What do you SEE?

1. The figure peers from behind a curtain that depicts a scene from nature. What do the placement, expression, and emotions of the person suggest about the quote?
2. The place the person is coming from is much darker than the place they might step into. How does this reflect the quote?
3. What emotions does this image arouse in you? When have you identified with the person in the poster?

What do you THINK?

1. Was there ever a time when you were discouraged from or afraid of asking a question? How did you feel and react?
2. Have you ever been faced with a question that could not be answered? What did you do then?
3. What questions do you bring to Judaism? Where do you seek your answers?

We must believe not only that all people are created equal but also that all peoples are created equal.

Natan Sharansky



NATAN SHARANSKY (b. 1948) is an Israeli politician and human rights activist who serves as Chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel. Anatoly (later Natan) Sharansky achieved international fame when the Soviet regime denied him an exit visa to Israel and imprisoned him. His wife, Avital, traveled the world from 1977–1986, meeting with world leaders and leading the struggle to earn freedom for her husband and other Soviet Jews. Sharansky was released in 1986 and moved to Israel, where he became the leading spokesman of the movement to free Soviet Jewry. He later founded a political party and served in the Knesset and several governmental positions.

VOICES

Commentary by RABBI BENJAMIN SAMUELS

One of the most difficult challenges we face in the twenty-first century is whether we should advocate for, and even impose, our values such as democracy and civil rights, upon others in our world.

Pluralism demands that we celebrate our world's remarkable diversity of cultures and religions. But does pluralism require that we tolerate tyrannical forms of government, religious beliefs that promote violence and oppression, cultures that suppress human freedom?

Sharansky, a former refusenik and champion of human rights, offers us an answer. While the U.S. Declaration of Independence speaks of the equality of all people—"all men are created equal"—Sharansky expands this idea to all peoples. On the one hand, the equality of peoples supports the principle of pluralism. There is a self-evident, inalienable right for each people within our world of nations to develop and sustain its own unique culture and national identity. On the other hand, the very right of equality also requires of each people that it values and upholds fundamental human dignity and civil rights by governing itself through some form of democracy. Fear societies that govern through terror and tyranny need to be replaced by free societies that give voice and vote to the equality of people and peoples.

By defending the freedom of peoples, Sharansky also legitimates the national rights and Zionist aspirations of the Jewish people and Israel, along with those of every people and country. Sharansky challenges us to promote personal freedom and advance peace among peoples.

RABBI BENJAMIN SAMUELS has served as rabbi of Congregation Shaarei Tefillah (Newton, MA) since 1995. He is a Genesis Scholar at Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies, a Meah instructor, and a master teacher at Ma'ayan. He is a member of several national and local Jewish organizational boards and a doctoral student in Boston University's religion and science program. Rabbi Samuels studied at Yeshiva University as a Wexner Graduate Fellow, receiving rabbinic ordination and an MA in both Bible and medieval Jewish history.



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JEAN CLAUDE (J.C.) SUARES (1942–2013) was an illustrator, graphic designer, and creative consultant whose work embellished major publications and dozens of books. Soares served as the first design director of *The New York Times*' Op-Ed page in the 1970s. He then worked as a creative consultant for over 100 magazines, including *ESPN*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Fast Company*, *New York*, *Variety*, and *INC*. Soares was valued as a mentor to many young professionals in the publishing industry. The Voices & Visions® program is indebted to Soares as creative director and artist, and dedicates the Frames of Mind series to his memory. May his memory be for a blessing.



What do you SEE?

1. Which characters stand out to you? Which most reminds you of yourself? Which would you pick to represent your people?
2. Which visual elements describe individuality, "people," and which represent "peoples"?
3. Why is it significant that the people of the world have assembled on a stage? What is happening among the characters, and between the characters and the audience?

What do you THINK?

1. Do you agree with Sharansky that "all peoples are created equal"? Is there a necessary connection between the two beliefs that "all people are created equal" and that "all peoples are created equal"?
2. The Torah calls the children of Israel *am segulah*, God's chosen people. What does this mean to you? Can the idea of *am segulah* be reconciled with Sharansky's teaching about the equality of both people and peoples?
3. As a politician and human rights activist, Sharansky wrote *The Case for Democracy* proposing solutions to problems facing the peoples of the Middle East, in general, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in particular. Do you believe that democracy can solve these challenges?

It's when the winds blow the hardest that you need the deepest roots.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks



RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS (b. 1948) is a world-renowned scholar, author, and philosopher. He served as chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013. Rabbi Sacks is currently a professor of Jewish thought at New York University and Yeshiva University. He has received numerous honorary degrees and awards, and was knighted by Her Majesty The Queen and awarded life peerage and a seat in the House of Lords. Rabbi Sacks is the author of tens of books, including annotated prayer books for the major holidays, and is the recipient of many literary awards. He is a sought-after lecturer and scholar, and regarded as one of the most influential contemporary rabbis.

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Interview and commentary by BETH KISSILEFF

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks's image of blowing winds threatening a tree is inspired by Psalm 1. This Psalm compares a righteous person to "a tree planted by rivers of water" which bears abundant fruit and whose leaves do not wither. In contrast, the wicked are compared to "chaff" blown by the wind.

The Jewish people, like a deeply-rooted tree, face two dangers, according to Sacks. Firstly, "high winds" threaten to knock over the tree. "The high winds are anti-Semitism," which Sacks believes can be defeated, but only when Jews "form a common front, an alliance in defense of human dignity and religious liberty."

The second risk which a tree faces is lack of water, which causes the leaves to shrivel and the tree to die. Sacks compares this to Jews who "don't study Judaism . . . Torah is water. . . Without the Torah, you don't feed the roots, and the leaves eventually wither and die." Sacks is confident that engagement with the rich Jewish literary tradition can reconnect Jews to their roots and water source. "We are a religion whose heroes are teachers, citadels are houses of study, and the passion is for education." Sacks credits technology, particularly the Internet, with expanding and enhancing opportunities to connect to our literary tradition.

Connecting to the past is only the beginning, says Sacks. "We are in love with the past but not *in* the past. Jews are the greatest example in history of a forward looking people." For Jews, "Ancient truth remains contemporary. The old is perennially renewed."

BETH KISSILEFF is a writer, freelance journalist, and educator. She is the author of a forthcoming novel, *Questioning Return*, and editor of an anthology, *Reading Genesis*. Her writing has appeared in *Haaretz.com*, *Slate.com*, *NYTimes.com*, *WashingtonPost.com*, *Huffington Post*, *The Tower*, *Jewish Review of Books*, *Tablet*, *The Forward*, *Jerusalem Report*, *Jerusalem Post*, and *The Jewish Week*. Kissileff has taught Jewish studies and English literature at a number of universities and in adult education settings.



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FRANCES JETTER is an illustrator and teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York. Her works are rich in political and social subject matter, and have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, and *The Nation*, to name a few. Jetter's prints and artist's books are in numerous permanent collections, including the Detroit Institute of Arts, the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress. She has received fellowships from New York Foundation for the Arts, a grant from the Puffin Foundation, and multiple awards for her work.



What do you SEE?

1. What insights about the quote are communicated by the way the characters are arranged? What sort of winds do you think are blowing against them?
2. The characters are focused straight ahead, looking at the viewer. What could they be saying to you?
3. How do the choice of color and style of art support the quote? What emotion does this image create in you?

What do you THINK?

1. What does the metaphor of "deepest roots" suggest to you?
2. What are the deepest roots to your Judaism? What winds threaten them?
3. How can contemporary Jews remain true to their roots, but also adapt to new environments and situations? How do new and old coexist in Jewish tradition?

Until we are all free . . . none of us are free.

Emma Lazarus



EMMA LAZARUS (1849–1887) was an American poet who is most famous for the lines of her sonnet which appear on the Statue of Liberty. Lazarus studied American and British literature, as well as several languages, including German, French, and Italian. She wrote her own poems, edited many adaptations of leading German poets, and penned a novel and two plays. When Lazarus learned of the pogroms against Russian Jewry in 1881, she spoke out against the rising anti-Semitism, and strove to assist Russian immigrants in building new lives in New York.

VOICES

Commentary by RABBI JILL JACOBS

The Passover Haggadah opens with a paradox:
“We were slaves in Egypt . . . now we are free.”

“Today we are enslaved; next year may we be free.” We begin our Seder each year by stating the impossible: We are free, yet we remain enslaved.

We are free insofar as we have escaped physical bondage. Yet, we are enslaved because we still depend on forced labor for our everyday goods.

Today, slavery still permeates our society. An estimated twenty-one to twenty-seven million people in the world remain in slavery. These slaves harvest our chocolate, sew our clothes, pick our vegetables, and polish our nails. They receive little or no pay, and are prevented from leaving through physical or emotional abuse. Slaves work in every industry and in every country, including the United States.

Our ancestors knew that freedom means not only the absence of physical bondage, but also the liberty to live according to our own values and ethics.

That’s why they went straight from slavery to accepting the Torah, with its system of laws aimed at creating a more just world.

Today, we cannot fully live by our ethics and values, because we depend on a supply chain so long and complicated that we rarely know when and where slaves are involved.

Therefore, the celebration of our own freedom must be accompanied by efforts to bring about the liberation of all people. The ancient Haggadah text, like Emma Lazarus many centuries later, insists that until we are all free, none of us are free.

RABBI JILL JACOBS is the executive director of T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, which mobilizes action to protect human rights in America and Israel. Rabbi Jacobs lectures and publishes widely on social justice and human rights. She received her rabbinic ordination and an MA in Talmud from the Jewish Theological Seminary, where she was a Wexner Graduate Fellow. Rabbi Jacobs has been named on *The Forward’s* list of “50 Influential American Jews” and *Newsweek’s* list of the 50 Most Influential Rabbis in America.



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OFRA AMIT is an award-winning Israeli illustrator whose works are featured in magazines, newspapers, and children’s books. She graduated from WIZO Canada Institute of Design in Haifa, Israel, and has been awarded many prestigious honors, including the *Communication Arts’* Illustration Annual, *Applied Arts’* Illustration Annual, Bologna Children’s Books Fair Illustrator’s Exhibition, Andersen Contest, Ben-Yitzhak Award of the Israel Museum, Society of Illustrators’ 2006 award.



What do you SEE?

1. The artist repeated the same figure twice; how are they similar and different? Which one is the most free?
2. What is the role of the bird in the picture—visually and metaphorically?
3. Similarly, what role does the cage play both visually and metaphorically?

What do you THINK?

1. The central Jewish narrative revolves around slavery and liberation. What role does this narrative play in your Jewish life and in how you think about your own Jewish identity?
2. How do contemporary examples of slavery affect you? In what ways do these realities make you less free?
3. Have you ever felt the tension between your freedom and the lack of freedom of someone else? What did you do in that situation?

A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.

Franz Kafka



FRANZ KAFKA (1883–1924) was an author and writer whose novels explore the human struggle for understanding. Kafka studied law at the University of Prague, worked in insurance, and wrote novels. He later moved to Berlin to focus on his writing, but published very little during his lifetime. After Kafka's passing, his friend Max Brod published many of Kafka's novels and stories and earned Kafka his place among the great writers of German literature. Kafka suffered from depression and anxiety, and these heavy emotions are echoed in his stories and characters.

VOICES

Commentary by RABBI ETHAN TUCKER

Can you ever forget the times when your heart leapt into your throat as you read a riveting book for the first time? When was the last time a book shattered your world, completely altering your perspective? And how many times have you plowed through endless pages of text, only to realize you barely remember any of it? Sometimes books thaw out our insides; sometimes they allow us to hide within our own boredom and alienation.

Franz Kafka was an early-twentieth century, German-language Jewish author. Inside each of us, says Kafka, is a frigid core. We can easily become set in our ways and numb to the outside world. Only an axe can shatter the most hardened surfaces, such as thick ice. When the frozen surface is not simply a sea, but a human soul, we need books to break open our calcified hearts. Only words of critique and rebuke will effectively free the living waters that run beneath.

This image is harsh, even violent. But the notion that words have the power to change the world is an old idea, and a very Jewish one. In Psalm 147:18, the Bible speaks of how divine words melt the snow that blankets the earth. This softer image of melting offers a gentler perspective on the power of words. Words can break us, as in Kafka's image. But they can also warm us and melt our frozen hearts, releasing energy and potential from within that can, in turn, warm others.

RABBI ETHAN TUCKER is Rosh Yeshiva and chair in Jewish law at Mechon Hadar. Rabbi Tucker was ordained by the chief rabbinate of Israel and earned a PhD in Talmud and rabbinics from the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was a Wexner Graduate Fellow. He cofounded Kehilat Hadar and is a winner of the first Grinspoon Foundation Social Entrepreneur Fellowship. Rabbi Tucker was selected three times by *Newsweek* as one of the 50 Most Influential Rabbis in America.



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ORIT BERGMAN is an Israeli writer and illustrator, and instructor of illustration and design at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem. Berman studied at Bezalel and at the School of Visual Arts in New York. She writes and illustrates children's books, several of which have been translated, and frequently contributes illustrations to newspapers, magazines, advertisement campaigns, and exhibitions. Bergman also does set design and illustrations for theater, including performances of some of her own books.



What do you SEE?

1. How does the high contrast, black and white formal clothing help reinforce the idea in the quote? What meaning can you infer from the use and placement of the color red?
2. By the demeanor and actions of the man, what do you think he is trying to say in support of the quote? Does knowing that the man is Kafka change your experience of the poster?
3. The book the man reveals is called *HaGilgul*—Hebrew for Kafka's book, *Metamorphosis*—how does that contribute to the image?

What do you THINK?

1. What is the last book you read that had the effect on you that Kafka is describing here?
2. What frozen seas do you have inside you? What does the image of an axe breaking the frozen sea suggest to you? What happens after the axe breaks the frozen sea? How is it a metaphor for a good book?
3. In the larger context of this quote, Kafka says we should "read only the kind of books that wound or stab us." Do you agree? What other kind of books do you read and why?

Imagination is more important than knowledge.

Albert Einstein



ALBERT EINSTEIN (1879–1955) was a brilliant physicist whose theory of relativity transformed our understanding of the universe. Born in Germany and trained in Switzerland, Einstein taught at German universities and was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics in 1921. With the rise of Hitler, Einstein assumed a position at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. He received numerous honorary degrees and awards in recognition of his research and breakthroughs, and published hundreds of scientific and nonscientific works. Einstein was a staunch Zionist and one of the founders of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, ultimately bequeathing his archives to the Hebrew University.

VOICES

Commentary by DINA MUSKIN GOLDBERG

At first glance, it's a little hard to believe that Albert Einstein, the ultimate man of knowledge, once said: "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

Yet when thought about carefully, it is clear that knowledge, comprised of facts and data, is finite, while imagination is infinite. Imagination is taking one's knowledge and going beyond it with experimentation. It is the force that allows one to take chances and risks. With risk, comes the possibility of failure. But the greatest success stories come from those who follow their imagination, not just their knowledge.

One only need look at the Holocaust and the early State of Israel to understand what Einstein meant. Among the numerous stories recounted by survivors, one usually hears the following: "When we got to the camps a Nazi officer asked if anyone was a tailor. I was a math teacher, but I still raised my hand and was taken out of the line. That is what saved my life." And so math teachers used their imaginations and became tailors.

These same survivors used their imaginations when they arrived in Palestine and took up arms to fight in the War of Independence. They had no knowledge of weapons or combat. What they did have was an imagination that dreamed of a free life in a Jewish homeland and that helped create the State of Israel.

The possibility of failure loomed large in front of these survivors. Yet they, like Einstein, understood that imagination was their greatest resource, far greater than knowledge.



DINA MUSKIN GOLDBERG is the development associate for the Simon Wiesenthal Center and Museum of Tolerance in New York. She graduated with degrees in political science and business from Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women. Goldberg was an AIPAC Diamond Intern, and organized a Yeshiva University mission to lobby on Capitol Hill. Goldberg was named one of the *Jewish Week's* "36 Under 36" in 2014, and is currently a Tikvah Fellow.

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EINAT PELED is an Israeli illustrator and designer. She studied graphic design at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem, and enjoys painting, drawing, and sketching. Peled's editorial illustration work has been published in numerous periodicals, including *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Food and Wine*, and *Yale Medicine* magazine. Her portfolio includes drawings and cover illustrations, as well as packaging and textiles.



What do you SEE?

1. What are the different ways the artist conveys the power of imagination in this poster?
2. Why do you think the artist chose stargazing as the central image? What other image might have you used?
3. Is "knowledge" represented in this poster? What feelings does the poster evoke for you about imagination and knowledge?

What do you THINK?

1. Do you agree with Albert Einstein that "Imagination is more important than knowledge?" What else could be more important than "knowledge?"
2. Can you think of any other examples from Jewish history where imagination was more important than knowledge?
3. How can one nurture this concept of imagination in daily life without disconnecting from the "real world" and its demands and constraints?