

Activity 2: From Optimism to Hope - Agency in Uncertain Times

(Hevruta Study of texts to facilitate conversation of agency in uncertain times)

Framing for the activity:

The piece ahead of you can resonate in many different situations. As you read, think about how its message connects to the current reality your fellows are experiencing, and how it might speak to them in this moment.

Background: Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (1948–2020)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was a British Chief Rabbi, philosopher, and author known for connecting Jewish thought with modern life

Hevruta Study:

Hand out the following quote and questions to the fellows.

"Optimism and hope are not the same. Optimism is the belief that the world is changing for the better; hope is the belief that, together, we can make the world better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope. The Hebrew Bible is not an optimistic book. It is, however, one of the great literatures of hope." - Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World

Questions:

1. According to Rabbi Sacks, what is the fundamental difference between "optimism" and "hope"?
2. Why does he describe optimism as "passive" and hope as "active"?
3. Why do you think he argues that it takes "courage" to hope, but not to be an optimist?
4. In your time in Israel, where do you see examples of "passive optimism" (waiting for things to improve) versus "active hope" (people taking action)?
5. Rabbi Sacks emphasizes that hope is the belief that together we can make the world better. How has the constant proximity of your group changed your ability to practice "hope"?
6. If optimism is a feeling and hope is an action, what is one "act of hope" you can commit to this week?