

CHEVRAH TORAH 5778...Seeking ✧ Spirituality

Shabbat LECH L'CHAH

Genesis 12:1-6

KEY KOSHI:

HOW IS AVRAM *CREATED* BY HIS CALL?

HOW DOES ABRAHAM'S CALL ECHO?

ON OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS, WHAT CAN IT MEAN FOR US TO HEAR/RESPOND TO THE CALL?

P'SHAT—AWARENESS... The beginning of knowing about God is simply paying attention, being fully present where you are

12:1] 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.

2] 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.

3] I will bless those who bless you

And curse him that curses you;

And all the families of the earth
Shall bless themselves by you."

4] Abram went forth as the Lord had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

5] Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan, 6] Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ
מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ : ² וְאָנֹכִי
לְגֹי גָדוֹל וְאֲבָרְכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמִי
וְהָיָה בְרָכָה : ³ וְאֲבָרְכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ
וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֲאֹר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְךָ כָּל
מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה : ⁴ וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ
לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בְּרַחֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים
שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן : ⁵ וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם
אֶת־שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־אָחִיו
וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת־
הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בַחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלַכְתָּ
אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן :
⁶ וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֵם
עַד אֵלּוֹן מוֹרֶה וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ :

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי וְצִוֵּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ—UN-SELF-AWARENESS... God showed Moses a Torah of black fire written on white fire.

The negative ground on and by which all things can be read is itself a message.

12:1

The Lord said to Avram: Go forth from your land, from your birthplace, from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.

RASHI... *Lech L'chah...* For your own benefit and good... There "I will make of you a great nation,"

But here you will not [even] merit having children.

BREISHIT RABBAH... "*Lech L'cha,*" When the Holy One called to Avram, what did he resemble? A jar of perfume with a tight-fitting lid, hidden away so no fragrance could escape. But in his leaving, the lid was loosened, the jar now opened, and Avram's goodness began to spread.

MEI HaSHILOA'ACH... God's first words to Avram, literally mean, "*betake yourself,*" as the Midrash interprets, 'Go Forth to discover your authentic self, to learn who you are meant to be.'

R' AARON of KARLIN... "*Lech L'cha,*" Go to—into yourself... Find your essence, for this is our very purpose!

OR HaCHAYIM... There are two reasons for the most unusual phenomenon of God speaking to Abraham without first having appeared in a vision. 1) Abraham's constant endeavor to get to know his Creator, something no one had done before. According to Tradition, Abraham already recognized the Creator at the age of 5... God did not have to prove His existence. Abraham knew who was calling... 2) During the 10 generations since Noah, not a single human being had recognized God as to be found worthy of God's address. So, after Abraham passed the first test, of leaving home did God reveal Himself in a vision.[v.7]

R'MOSHE GREENWALD... How often does an awakening come to an average person that he needs to break out, to ascend, to climb higher... but in the midst of the journey something stops him from going further?... Then there are the righteous who do not stop half way. This was the essential difference between Terah and Avram, his son. For Terah, too, had that awakening—a spiritual pull that lead him towards Canaan. But he stopped. Avram, however was not satisfied. He saw the road ahead and had the will to go on... and so the call came.

R'S.R. HIRSCH... The call to separate oneself from homeland, birthplace, father's house constituted the first step toward the realization of Judaism. To be a Jew means to break with the crowd out of love for God... The Divine call *Lech L'cha*—Go for yourself, implies the will to go it alone with God, if need be. The idea of the "majority rule" is indeed legitimate. But when the majority's values do not meet the criterion of Truth... man has the duty to stand in opposition to the spirit of the times... and in keeping with his Call, respond...

RASHI... God did not reveal to him the destination outright in order to make it more precious in his eyes... and to make every new word of direction a reward, just as in "*Take your son, your only one—the one you love, Isaac...*" [Gen 22:2]

TALMUD... R' Huna taught in the name of R' Eliezer, God's call first places the righteous in doubt, and only later reveals to them the meaning of the matter, as in "*upon the mountain which I will show you.*" [Gen22:2]

BUBER... The place held by the story of Abraham requires this story to fulfill a threefold task. It must first make visible its relation to its own past, to show how Abraham appears as a new beginning... Secondly, it must measure out the road, and let us follow the road taken through the divine call and promise... and it must luminously forecast the road to be followed for these followers to become a people, receiving a call all their own... [On The Bible, ed N.N. Glatzer, Schocken, pgs 30-31]

ZORNBERG... For the first time, a journey is undertaken not as an act of exile [Adam, Cain] or a quest for domination [the Generation of Babel] but as a response to a Divine imperative.

12:2 *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... Up until now, the blessings were in My hand. I blessed Adam. I blessed Noah. But from now on, the power to bless will be in your hands.

ETZ HAYIM... Hirsch takes this not as a promise but rather a command. To merit the promised reward, you must so live as to be a blessing to the world. This is our answer to God's Call...

D'RASH—READING BETWEEN THE WORDS...

Prof PETER PITZELE...

It was Abraham who first understood that spiritual light comes to the one who goes by way of darkness, power to the one who has given up power, victory to the one who has surrendered, and that life is given to the one who has died...Abraham speaks to the part of me that wanders; speaks to those times in my life when I have felt adrift in a universe that is haunted by mystery and that bears strange, elusive meanings...

We do not know the motive for Terah's migration, but we know he reached only the western border of his homeland...Immediately after the words "Terah died in Haran" comes the following: *"Then the Lord called Abram and said, "Leave your native land and your father's house and go to the land I will point out to you." (12:1)*

In this moment a beam of light picks Abram out from a jumble of figures. The bustle of life in Haran recedes suddenly into deep shadow. A man, apparently no one special, is arrested in the middle of things; the flow of his life is interrupted by a voice. It addresses him. No context. No preparation. No proof. Just a man hearing a voice—which calls to him, summons him, directs him: "Leave...and go."

Terah's dream to reach Canaan has gone unfulfilled; Abram is called to complete it, but in a way his father could never have imagined. In the Terah-Abram story this generation's progress begins as the dream of Terah for Canaan; it is renewed in the son and recast, spiritualized, and empowered by a force greater than anything Terah knew. Abram will become Abraham and pass the dream on, unfulfilled, to his son Isaac; then Isaac to his son Jacob, and still the dream is unfulfilled. Each generation renews the dream in its own terms...responding to the very same summons.

This generational enterprise remains alive and potent precisely and paradoxically because it is never completely fulfilled...Zion remains a dreamland...Jews live in expectancy, travel as sojourners toward a place that is never reached, toward a time that will never be....

It is the message of Abraham that each generation must be called to the journey...Each one's call is also a recollection, a recalling of previous calls. The dream outlives the dreamers. It asks to be remembered in every generation, but every generation must dream anew. Whenever the father has settled and died, the child must set out again into a wilderness to live the dream...to answer the call.

Rabbi LARRY KUSHNER...

The text could have just read, "And Avram set out..." That would have been mythically elegant. But, instead, God gets personal. The first thing God says to the first Jew is "leave your parents' home." And as the ancient rabbinic dictum has it: What happens to the parents is already a sign of what will happen to the children...The great, unending psycho-spiritual task of every human being is separating from his or her parents. Loved or hated, near or far, living or long dead, it is never done. We spend our days trying to be who we imagine we want to be and not who they wanted us

to be. We strive with all our cunning to infuriate them even as we secretly yearn to make them smile and to fulfill their secret dreams. But before we can finish, or even figure out what's going on, we have our own children and the whole thing starts all over again from the other side.

In any case, the text is clear: Doing business with this new, imageless, and as yet unnamed God means to leave home, to commence the struggle, to believe unto your dying breath that you will break free from their orbit. But as you grow older—much older—you would be grateful if you could just strike a balance between your parents and yourself and between yourself and your children. Maybe that is *the land that God will show us*, and what it means *to be a blessing*.

SOD—The SELF of the UNIVERSE... God's "I am" has the psycho-theological force not of dissolving individual selves but of reminding us that we were never individual selves in the first place...Our selfhood endures by virtue of its participation in some greater Self,

Prof MARTIN MARTY... [School of Theology, University of Chicago]...How on earth can we tell if a call is real?...To most of the three billion people who are "Abrahamic"—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—Abraham's story shapes much of their lives and gives meaning to their hopes...You cannot talk them out of the notion that the call to Abraham made them a people with special blessings and responsibilities. If we agree on nothing else, we can agree that the call was fateful.

Most of the time, we slide too fast over the little words "*The Lord said...*" Should we trust a story that finds God saying something and half of the human race changing because a man heard what God said? Abraham heard voices—or a voice. Should we trust the story, the voice? Does it come to others? To us? Who hears voices now? First, the fanatic...Second, people with schizophrenia hear voices, sometimes even a voice of the Lord. Third, religious prophets and apostles...

Most give a special status to the calls of long ago, attested to in the various scriptures...And the call of Abraham stands unique...it echoes...[But] Not being Abraham, how should we think of a "call"? How do we test one, if it comes? Most of the scriptures that talk about God talking also teach skepticism along with faith: "The best advice is: If the call is too direct, too "miraculous"-sounding, beware." Through the centuries, the people who most felt called and did most with their call found their vocation not through a voice from the clouds or the mountains or even within themselves. Instead, they saw their whole lives as grounded in the mysterious care of a loving God, who does leave traces in history: in events, in scriptures, in the calls and demands of other people, in the faithful heard.

The serious people whose life one can observe that they sensed a divine call, tend to be those who let God speak through a million little particulars in life. Odds are, those who lived their lives in response to such a demand and promise were challenged along the way by others...and were open to those challenges. Never rule out the possibility that a sense of calling will be a force for positive good: The world gets changed, often for the better, because of such responses. And never completely let your guard down: Responses to the call can be dangerous, as many victims of called and chosen people and peoples could have attested. The story of Abraham and Sarah challenges, disturbs, and inspires us; it can change our ordinary lives and make us extraordinary, if cautiously, responsive.