

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

October 22 -28, 2023
7-13 Cheshvan 5784

Torah: Lech Lecha
Genesis 12:1 - 17:27
Haftorah: Isaiah 40:27
41:16

PARSHAT LECH LECHA

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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No One Alone,
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Keep on Trucking

This week's Torah reading details the difficult journeys of Abraham, the first Jew.

Abraham travels from his homeland to Israel and immediately a nasty famine breaks out. Was it his fault? Not really. Was it bad PR? Definitely. New Guy shows up in a country, screaming about the oneness of G-d, and crisis strikes. Abraham leaves the famine, runs to Egypt, and Sarah, his lovely wife, is abducted. Good times.

The name of the Torah portion is the "theme" of that portion. The name of the tough-luck Torah portion which recounts this story is "Lech Lecha." In its most literal sense it means, "Go to yourself." It is a command to Abraham, the first Jew, and the rest of us as well. "Lech Lecha" entails an inner journey to discover one's essence, and to integrate that essence into our life and environment. It is a message of inner discovery that leads to movement in a positive direction. The journey of life moves forward, but never stays on level ground. The title of the Torah portion (the supposed theme of the entire portion) is one of forward mobility toward spiritual achievement and G-dly revelation, while the content of the portion seem decidedly negative and uninspiring. How do we reconcile the contradiction? The journey of life is like a car that moves forward but never stays on level ground. We ride up mountains and into deep valleys. Life is similar. The objective is to see the opportunity for growth at every twist in the road, and keep on trucking. On rare days, we coast along at the top of our game. We cruise the peaks of personal and spiritual fulfillment. Our role and place in the universe is apparent and we feel satisfied.

On the bad days, we careen out of control and into a valley of

personal problems and issues. Our desire to "keep on keeping on" falters. On most days, we sit in traffic and question if we are moving at all. The lesson of Lech Lecha offers hope and support to those traveling through the ups and downs of life. We must recognize that the goal is forward movement. Hence, even a self-imposed pitiful state of being is a step forward in the journey. Just as Abraham needed to go to Egypt (in order to leave with great wealth), so, too, G-d needs us to be where we are.

Although we should seek to correct the root cause of a particular downward spiral, we must also view the resulting situation as a Divine opportunity. We should not lose hope but rather pick up the pieces and continue forward.

By Simcha Levenberg

Pleased to Meet Me

How do we ever really know who we are? Why we do the things we do? Why we make the decisions we make? As children, we are raised in an environment where choices are made for us, and our specific circumstances and surroundings often determine how our lives are lived. As we grow older, we gain more independence and freedom. We are given more responsibility; we have more say in different matters. And at a certain age we leave our homes, where we are finally on our own and we determine how we will live. Yet there is always a question as to how we come to these decisions. The Torah should unveil our personal autobiography. If we follow in the way that we were raised, then we have to wonder if we really chose this for ourselves, or if we are doing this because it is what we know and what we are comfortable with. On the other hand, if we rebel against our upbringing and do the opposite, then the question still remains. Are we doing what we

feel is right, or are we just not doing things the way we were taught? The lifelong process of figuring out who we are and who we want to be is what this week's Torah portion, Lech Lecha, is all about. There is a Chassidic concept that we should "live with the times," meaning that as each Torah portion is read, we need to find ourselves—our lives—in the words. The Torah, when properly learned, should unveil our personal autobiography. So, what do we learn from Abraham? Abraham is a rebel. And from a very young age. But a rebel with a cause. The Midrash teaches us that as a small child he was sent to a cave, to solitary confinement, where he spent three years. When he emerged, he knew Hebrew and knew that there was a G-d, the Creator of the world (Otzar Midrashim, "Ma'aseh Avraham"). He came out knowing who he was and what he believed, and began He looked within. He read his soul. It is said that when the whole world was on one side, on eiver echad, Abraham was on the other side, eiver sheni. It is this very word eiver that the term for the Hebrews, Ivri, comes from. For as a Jewish people, we are commanded to follow the Torah and live according to its ways, even if the whole world is against us. This is why a convert to Judaism is called the son or daughter of Abraham. For a convert has the greatest test of all; the convert is the potential Jewish soul that has been born to non-Jewish parents. The convert is the one who has to stand on the other side, to break away from how he or she was raised, educated and brought up to believe, and say, "No matter what you think, I know my soul, and I am a Jew." And us. This is why a convert to Judaism is called the son or daughter of Abraham. For a convert has the greatest test of all; the convert is the potential

Jewish soul that has been born to non-Jewish parents. The convert is the one who has to stand on the other side, to break away from how he or she was raised, educated and brought up to believe, and say, “No matter what you think, I know my soul, and I am a Jew.” And The Torah portion begins, “Go for yourself, from your land, from the place where you were born and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). According to the Zohar, the words *lech lecha*, which constitute the name of the Torah portion and are in its opening verse, do not only mean “go for yourself,” but simultaneously mean “go to yourself.” And how do we go to ourselves, discover who we truly are? We need to leave our land, our birthplace and our father’s home. This teaches us that in order to really know ourselves, we must temporarily distance ourselves from the influences of those around us. This doesn’t mean that we need to physically move or go anywhere (though for some that may be part of the process); but spiritually and emotionally, we need to meet ourselves all over again. So, we must leave our land, society at large, American culture, the socioeconomic pressures. We need to stop worrying about what the world wants from us, and start looking within, to our soul, to know what we want from ourselves, what our Creator wants from us. But that is not enough. We must go from where we were born. From our more direct surroundings. From those whom we were raised with, our school systems, our communities, our friends and extended family. We must not allow their influences to get in the way of learning who we are truly meant to be. And then, hardest but just as essential, we must go from our father’s home. We must recognize that as much as we may want to live in the very path that we were raised (ideally, this is the case), we must choose it for ourselves. We must take ownership of this direction. It is then, and only then, that the new land is shown to us—our potential, our possibilities, and the world that awaits us. It is only then that we can progress, for we cannot move forward until we truly know who we are. This is how we *lech lecha*, go from ourselves, back to ourselves. Even a fish that is dead will move with the current. And we do this as *Ivrim*, as Jews, willing to stand on “the other side,” from the rest of the world, as those who will pursue truth and righteousness, even when popular view may greatly differ. The more we break those idols in our own world and the world around us, the stronger we can become. This is what Abraham teaches us. This is what it means to be a Jew—to swim against the current, reveal our G-dly soul and our unique missions in this world—when we go from ourselves to ourselves, to discover and reveal our true essence.

By Sara Esther Crispe

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, October 22, 2023-7 Cheshvan, 5784

Last Jew comes home (2nd Temple Era)

During the Second Temple Era (circa 230 BCE), Cheshvan 7 was the date on which the Jew most distant from the Holy Temple -- who resided on the banks of the Euphrates River, a 15-day journey's distance from Jerusalem -- arrived at his homestead upon returning from the Sukkot pilgrimage.

Passing of R. Meir Shapiro (1933)

Passing of Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin, founder of the daily "page a day" regimen of Talmudic study known as *Daf Yomi*.

Monday, October 23, 2023-8 Cheshvan, 5784

Passing of R. Jonah of Gerona (1263)

R. Jonah was a thirteenth-century scholar who lived in Spain. Although originally opposed to Maimonides' philosophical works (most notably, his *Guide for the Perplexed*), he later changed his views, and even vowed to travel to Maimonides' gravesite to posthumously beg for forgiveness. (He indeed began the long journey, but passed away before completing it.)

R. Jonah authored *Shaarei Teshuvah* (an ethical work on repentance), a commentary on R. Isaac Al-Fasi's halachic compendium, and a commentary on *Ethics of the Fathers*, among other works.

Tuesday, October 24, 2023-9 Cheshvan, 5784

Passing of Rosh (1327)

The life and influence of Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel, known by the acronym "Rosh", straddled the two great spheres of the Jewish diaspora of his time, the Ashkenazic (Franco-German) and the Sephardic (Spanish-Mediterranean) communities. Born approximately 1250 in Western Germany, Rabbi Asher studied under the famed Tosaphist Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, fathered eight sons, and authored one of the earliest codifications of Jewish law. In mid-life he fled the persecutions of medieval Christian Europe, settling in Spain where Jews prospered materially and Jewish learning flourished in the Spanish Golden Age. Rabbi Asher passed away in Toledo on Cheshvan 9 of the year 5088 from creation (1327 of the Common Era).

Wednesday, October 25, 2023-10 Cheshvan, 5784

Birth of Gad

Gad, the son of Jacob and Zilpah, seventh of the Twelve Tribes, was born on the 10th of MarCheshvan. He lived to be 125 years old. (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Shemot*, *remez* 162)

Thursday, October 26, 2023-11 Cheshvan, 5784

Passing of Methuselah (2105 BCE)

Methuselah, the longest-lived human being of all time, died at the age of 969 years on the 11th of Cheshvan of the year 1656 from creation (2105 BCE) -- exactly seven days before the beginning of the Great Flood. Methuselah was Adam's great-great-great-great-great-grandson and Noah's grandfather.

Rachel (1553 BCE)

The matriarch Rachel died in childbirth on the 11th of Cheshvan of the year 2208 from creation (1553 BCE) while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin.

R. Nachum of Chernobyl (1797)

Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl was a disciple of the second leader of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch, and the founder of the Chernobyl dynasty of Chassidic Rebbes.

Friday, October 27, 2023-12 Cheshvan, 5784

Yitzhak Rabin (1995)

Yitzhak Rabin, Commander-in-Chief of the IDF during the Six Day War and later Prime Minister of Israel, was assassinated on this date in 5756 (1995).

Passing of R. Zev Wolf Kitzes (1787)

R. Zev Wolf was one of the prominent disciples of the *Baal Shem Tov*. A great scholar in his own right, he accompanied his master on many of his travels and witnessed his miraculous accomplishments firsthand.

Shabbat, October 28, 2023-13 Cheshvan, 5784

Burning of the Talmud in Venice (1553)

By order of the Pope, the Talmud was burned in Venice on the 13th and 14th of MarCheshvan, 1553 (*Minchah Belulah*, *Deuteronomy* 33:2). The reason given was that the Talmud contained statements heretical to the Christian faith. Venice boasted many famous Hebrew printing houses, including that of Daniel Bomberg, an Italian gentile who published the Talmud there during the years 1519–1523.