

Rabbi Joshua Samuels  
Congregation Beth Israel  
October 26, 2012

### Lech L'cha: You Want Me to Go Where?

"God said to Abram, Lech l'cha, Go forth from your native land, your birthplace, your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and it shall be a blessing." (Genesis 12:1-2)

So what did Abram do? "He went forth..." He left his home.

This story has always puzzled me. First of all, this is the first time Abraham and God have any communication with each other. Abraham hears a voice that says, "get out of here and I'll make your name great." And he leaves. There is no chapter beforehand that develops this relationship. Abraham simply follows the command without asking any questions such as, "Who are you?" "Where are you?" "Why do you want me to leave my home?" "What's the point of all this?" and "Who's going to pay for gas and lodging along the way?" A few reasonable questions, one would think.

Abraham shows complete and utter faith in God or in his inner conscience.

How many of you would have blindly followed in Abraham's footsteps? How many of you would have done the same thing Abraham did?

How many of you would have said, "No way, Jose!?"

Now the second thing that has puzzled me is the order of places that God tells Abraham to leave: his native land or country, then his birthplace or city, and then his father's house.

Yet, what actually happens is that he leaves his father's house first, then his town and finally his country. This is the logical sequence of events. What is going on here?

In one commentary (Leibovitz, 113) we learn that God's backward instruction isn't so backwards. In other words, God was sending Abraham on a spiritual rather than physical journey. The leaving of one's birthplace, for instance is not as difficult as the cutting of one's connection with one's family. First, therefore, Abraham was told to sever his connections with his country, then his city and finally the most intimate bond, that of his home, before he could become the new and improved Abraham, the patriarch of Judaism. Abraham had to break some emotional attachments before he could move forward. He had to go through quite a change and it started easier as opposed to harder.

Now think for a minute. Rank the three elements in Abraham's leave in order of their importance to you: country, city, and family home.

Which of these would be hardest for you to leave? Why?

Has anyone here ever left any of these places? Which was the most difficult? The physical or emotional departure?

I've left all of these places and they are all very difficult. I think it depends on the stage in life you are in. I still remember my first night at sleep away camp when I was 9. It was the pits. Yet, while I was excited to go away to college, my parents were a wreck. And when I went away to Israel for a year for rabbinical school, I was a little bit of a wreck myself, leaving my country, city and family. And when I left my childhood home for the last time that too was pretty emotional.

We find comfort in our home and this includes all three of these aspects: country, city, and family. It's hard to leave any of them when they have shaped who we are as individuals. Yet, Abraham needed to go through a transformation to become the person he became. And I think there are times when we need to leave a place we are attached to in order for us to grow.

There are many torah commentators who argue over what Lech L'cha means. Some say it means "Go forth!" Some think it means "Go by yourself," others, "Go to yourself," and still others think it means "Go for yourself."

One of my rabbinic school professors, Andrea Weiss wrote a poem about this very debate.

It's called, *Lech L'cha*

Go forth on a journey.

Go by yourself:  
Standing at a crossroads  
You venture from the known to the unknown.  
Some journeys must be made alone.

Go to yourself:  
Spiral inward and unwrap your past  
And your potential.  
Remember that the soul which you have made  
Is unique and holy.

Go for yourself:  
Smell the fragrance  
Which spreads across the land  
As you roam and wander.  
Refresh yourself  
Under the tree which grows by a spring  
At the side of the road.  
Make your name great and

Make your life a blessing.

Shabbat shalom.