בס"ד

AHAVAT ACHIM AT 50
קהלת אהבת אחים
Yovel
THE FAMILY SHUL

CANDLE LIGHTING 5:46 PM | 13 CHESHVAN | OCTOBER 24, 2026 | HAVDALA 6:48 PM

שבת פרשת לך לך
SHABBAT PARSHAT LECH LECHA

Haftorah is Isaiah 40:27-41:16. Final time for Kiddush Levanah of Cheshvan is Sun. night, October 25 (15 Cheshvan) until 10:05 PM.

FRIDAY EVENING	
MINCHA	**5:50 PM**
SHKIA	6:04 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	6:44 PM
SATURDAY	
HASHKAMA	**7:45 AM**
SHACHARIT	**9:00 AM**
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	≈9:30 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:59 AM
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	≈11:30 AM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	4:55 PM
MINCHA	**5:35 PM**
SHKIA	6:03 PM
MAARIV	**6:48 PM**

KIDDUSH



Kiddush is sponsored by Lori & David Garfunkel celebrating Uri's Auf Ruf and upcoming wedding to Abby Elson.

יעלה הזיווג יפה ויבנו בית נאמן בישראל

May the beautiful couple be elevated in the building of a faithful house of Israel.

SEUDAH SHLISHIT

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Marty Reichardt in memory of Cary ע"ה.

FALL INTO EARLY SHABBAT DINNER

Join us on Friday, November 6, after davening, for the first early Shabbat dinner of the year! We will kick off the season of early Shabbat dinners with a festive community meal. RSVP here: DINNER.

VETERANS KIDDUSH

Honor those who served in the US armed forces by adding a star to our board and donating in their name to our special Kiddush on Shabbat, November 14. Click here: VETERANS.

ORTHODOX UNION	SUNDAY 10/25	MONDAY 10/26	TUESDAY 10/27	WEDNESDAY 10/28	THURSDAY 10/29	FRIDAY 10/30
WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM						
SHACHARIT	**8:00 AM**	**6:15 AM**	**6:25 AM**	**6:25 AM**	**6:15 AM**	**6:25 AM**
2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM		**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**	**7:25 AM**
MINCHA/MAARIV	**5:49 PM**	**5:48 PM**	**5:47 PM**	**5:45 PM**	**5:44 PM**	**5:40 PM**
ZMANIM						
Earliest Talit	6:22 AM	6:23 AM	6:24 AM	6:25 AM	6:26 AM	6:27 AM
Gedolah	1:07 PM	1:07 PM	1:07 PM	1:06 PM	1:06 PM	1:06 PM
Shkia	6:01 PM	6:00 PM	5:59 PM	5:57 PM	5:56 PM	
Tzait	6:41 PM	6:40 PM	6:39 PM	6:37 PM	6:36 PM	

Rabbi Ely Shestack

President Jay Herman

UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct. 31 - The Evolution of Woman, a women's event, Saturday night.
Nov. 6 - Fall Into Early Shabbat Friday Night Dinner, after davening. RSVP here: DINNER.
Nov. 26 - Thanksgiving Flag Football & Pie Donation. Start your Thanksgiving Day with community and gratitude! RSVP here: THANKSGIVING.
Dec. 2 - Chanukah Shiur w/ Dinner.
Dec. 11 - Shabbat Chanukah Dinner.

IN OUR FUTURE - KIDDUSH, SEUDAH SHLISHIT, & ETC.



Nov. 7 - Birthday Kiddush.
Nov. 14 - Veterans Kiddush. Add a star to our board in honor of those who served. Click here: VETERANS.
Nov. 14 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Betsy & Marty Sonnenblick in memory of Betsy's mother, עלקא שיינדל בת צבי הירש, Elaine Perlmutter ע"ה.
Nov. 28 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Dina & Elliot Greene in memory of Dina's mother, זלדה בת צבי, Zelda Rubinowitz ע"ה, on her yahrzeit.
Dec. 5 - Birthday Kiddush.

BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH



To add a birthday/anniversary to upcoming lists (next Kiddush on Shabbat, November 7), click here: SIMCHA. Listings/ sponsorships are $36 per family per month. RSVP for the November birthday/ anniversary Kiddush by Sun. night, Nov. 1.

BOARD MEETINGS - 8:30 PM

- **Nov. 24**
- **Dec. 29, Jan. 26, Feb. 23, Mar. 30, May 11, June 29**

SHIURIM



- NEW FACETS ON THE PARSHA, Tuesdays at 1:00 PM, click here: Parsha.



- TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE, via Whatsapp, with 3-minute daily Halacha insights. To join email Rabbi Shestack at rabbishestack@gmail.com.
- POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR, analyzing Mishlei (Proverbs).
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush, discussing fascinating halachic topics on Shabbat (weather permitting, at the playground tables through Thanksgiving weekend). This week: **"Can You Return From a Hospital Visit On Shabbat"**
  - Oct. 31: "Hanging and Adjusting Hammocks and Swings on Shabbat"
  - Nov. 7: "Watching Bar Mitzvahs Videoed on Shabbat"
  - Nov. 14: "Washing Dishes with Steel Wool on Shabbat"
  - Nov. 21: "Paying a Babysitter for Work on Shabbat"
- SHABBAT SHIUR, **SANHEDRIN CH. 1**, 40 minutes prior to mincha.
- TZURBA M'RABANAN w/ Zack Doberman, Wednesdays at 8:30 PM. In-person at the shul and via Zoom.
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit.
- BEGINNER CLASS ON HOW TO READ HEBREW, Monday nights, 8:45 PM, at the shul. To sign up, click here: Hebrew.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Nov. 21, Saturday night - The Fair Lawn Mikvah Association's Fourth Annual Mikvah Chava Faiga Dinner, a community evening of unity for all women, at Congregation Shomrei Torah.
7:30 PM - Doors open.
8:00 PM - Reception and raffle prizes.
8:30 PM - Parve/dairy dinner and program.
$80 early bird; $95 after Nov. 9; $72 for first-time registrants. To register, click here: Mikvah.

18-25 Saddle River Road
Fair Lawn, NJ 07410
201.797.0502
http://www.ahavatachim.org

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה YOUTH EVENTS

Nov. 14 - Parent/Child Learning.
Dec. 5 - Chanukah program with children's seudah shlishit, followed by musical havdalah.
Dec. 19 - Parent/Child Learning.
Jan. 2 - Parent/Child Learning.

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה YOUTH LEADERS

3rd & Up:	SOPHIA & ZOE
K-2nd:	ARIELYS & NICOLE
2 Yrs - Pre-K:	DIAMOND, JAYME & JELANNY

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



- All groups start at 9:00 AM:
  – Tot Shabbat (new name for Parent & Me), birth-2 years old
  – 2 years old-Pre-K
  – K-2nd Grade
  – 3rd Grade and up
- Rabbi Meet & Greet, Friday night, kids can come over to the Rabbi after davening to receive a cup of grape juice and a ticket!
- Children earn tickets for coming to minyan (Friday night and/or Shabbat day), asking the rabbi questions or attending parent-child learning programs! Tickets can be redeemed for prizes.
- Children's corner at Seudah Shlishit, 1st to 5th graders will get 10 Torah questions in 10 minutes from Rabbi Shestack, with special snacks, tickets and more.

Shirley Vann has dedicated the attached Covenant & Conversation (used with permission of The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust) in memory of her beloved mother נעכא בת יצחק ע"ה.

Mishlei/Proverbs
Post-Hashkama Shiur 46 – Correcting Bad Behavior

כמְקַלֵּל אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ יִדְעַךְ נֵרוֹ בְּאֵשׁוּן (כתיב באישון) חֹשֶׁךְ: כאנַחֲלָה מְבֹהֶלֶת (כתיב מבחלת) בָּרִאשֹׁנָה וְאַחֲרִיתָהּ לֹא תְבֹרָךְ: כבאַל־תֹּאמַר אֲשַׁלְּמָה־רָע קַוֵּה לַי־ה־וָ־ה וְיוֹשַׁע לָךְ: כגתּוֹעֲבַת יְ־ה־וָ־ה אֶבֶן וָאָבֶן וּמֹאזְנֵי מִרְמָה לֹא־טוֹב: כדמֵי־ה־וָ־ה מִצְעֲדֵי־גָבֶר וְאָדָם מַה־יָּבִין דַּרְכּוֹ: כהמוֹקֵשׁ אָדָם יָלַע קֹדֶשׁ וְאַחַר נְדָרִים לְבַקֵּר: כומְזָרֶה רְשָׁעִים מֶלֶךְ חָכָם וַיָּשֶׁב עֲלֵיהֶם אוֹפָן: כזנֵר יְ־ה־וָ־ה נִשְׁמַת אָדָם חֹפֵשׂ כָּל־חַדְרֵי־בָטֶן: כחחֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת יִצְּרוּ־מֶלֶךְ וְסָעַד בַּחֶסֶד כִּסְאוֹ: כטתִּפְאֶרֶת בַּחוּרִים כֹּחָם וַהֲדַר זְקֵנִים שֵׂיבָה: לחַבְּרֻת פֶּצַע תַּמְרוּק (כתיב תמריק) בְּרָע וּמַכּוֹת חַדְרֵי־בָטֶן: –

20One who curses his father or his mother, his lamplight will be extinguished when the blackest darkness comes. 21An inheritance hastily seized at the outset; its end will not be blessed. 22Do not say "I will repay evil"; put your hope in the Lord and He will help you. 23Differing weights are an abomination to the Lord, and deceptive scales are not good. 24A man's steps are decided by the Lord, so how can a man understand his own way? 25It is a snare for a man to sanctify [a gift], and after [making] vows to reconsider. 26A wise king scatters the wicked and turns the wheel upon them. 27The soul of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost chambers. 28Kindness and truth protect a king, and he upholds his throne through kindness. 29The glory of young men is their strength, and the majesty of old men is their gray hair. 30Bruises and wounds purge evil, as do blows that reach one's innermost chambers.[1]

A. The last 11 pasukim of Mishlei Chapter 20 start by examining a man who has acted improperly with regard to his parents/family, and (perhaps) related matters.

- V. 20 → One who curses his father or his mother, his lamplight will be extinguished when the blackest darkness comes.
    - The Me'am Loez sees this as the person blowing out his own candle.
    - The Chevel Nachalah, based on the written באישון, notes that the gematria of the "י", which is not pronounced, is 10, and sees this as referencing the tenth commandment, *i.e.*, it is not only an adulterous relationship that can create such a wayward child, but thinking and desiring another during a moment of intimacy with your spouse ("coveting") can also result in creating such a child.
- V. 21 → An inheritance hastily seized at the outset; its end will not be blessed.
    - Commentators differ as to whether this seizure occurred while the parent was alive, amounted to theft, or was simply unseemly in how the property was taken.
    - Bamidbar Rabbah 22:9 applies this verse to Reuven and Gad, who hastily chose to take an inheritance on the east side of the Jordan River. In that regard, the Baal HaTurim, based on the written מבחלת, notes that the gematria of the "ח", which is pronounced as a "ה", is 8, and sees this as referencing the eight times in the Parsha that this request of Reuven and Gad are mentioned.
- V. 22 → Do not say "I will repay evil"; put your hope in the Lord and He will help you.
  V. 23 → Differing weights are an abomination to the Lord, and deceptive scales are not good.
    - At Vayikra 19:18 we are commanded: "You shall not take revenge from or bear a grudge against your fellow; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." At Mishlei 20:10 we were already told that false weights were an abomination.
    - Perhaps these two pasukim are directed at family members of the wayward sons discussed at 20:20-21, who might see acts of "self-help" justice (*e.g.*, using a false weight to recover what was improperly taken by another inheritor) as acceptable and not contrary to the Torah or advice previously given on false weights. Shlomo is warning against this thought process.

[1] Mishlei Chapter 20.

B. As distinguished from self-help justice, Shlomo turns to the limits of self-help through introspection.

- V. 24 → A man's steps are decided by the Lord, so how can a man understand his own way?
  - Compare this to Tehillim 37:23: "From the Lord a mighty man's steps are established, for He delights in his way."
  - Vilna Gaon sees this as a limit to what man can do with regard to "analyzing" his behavior, whether alone or with others, and that success in this endeavor can only occur when Hashem is included (perhaps by praying for Hashem's help or looking into the wisdom of his Torah for guidance.
- V. 25 → It is a snare for a man to sanctify [a gift], and after [making] vows to reconsider.
  - While translations of this verse vary greatly, this generally follows the traditional JPS translation. Following up on the idea of a man being incapable of sometimes understanding the "why" of his actions, this verse encourages you to avoid setting "traps" for yourself (sanctifying a gift that you might later not wish to give to Hashem or to make a vow that you might later regret and seek to annul).
- V. 27 → The soul of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost chambers.
  - When Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was dying, his students asked him for a blessing. He responded: "**May it be** His **will that the fear of Heaven shall be upon you like the fear of flesh and blood. His students** were puzzled **and said: To that point** and not beyond? Shouldn't one fear God more? **He said to them: Would that** a person achieve that level of fear. **Know that when one commits a transgression, he says** to himself: **I hope that no man will see me**. If one is as concerned about avoiding shame before God as he is before man, he would never sin."[2]
- V. 29 → The glory of young men is their strength, and the majesty of old men is their gray hair.
  - When discussing Mishlei 19:18, we noted that a lack of self-respect can cause one to abandon hope of improving or correcting oneself. Here Shlomo makes clear, whether young or old, that there is glory and majesty for you to lean on when trying to get back on a proper path.

C. Self-help notwithstanding, outside "influences" can also help individuals with improper character traits stay on the correct path.

- V. 26 → A wise king scatters the wicked and turns the wheel upon them.
  V. 28 → Kindness and truth protect a king, and he upholds his throne through kindness.
  - At this point, the king is reminded of his role in maintaining observance of mitzvot, at least following the translations/commentators that see the wheel as a device that inflicts pain as a form of punishment for improper acts.
  - Shlomo takes care to make sure the king understands that corporal punishment is not to be meted out in anger, but with kindness and truth as the focal point of punishments that need to be administered.
- V. 30 → Bruises and wounds purge evil, as do blows that reach one's innermost chambers.
  - If you were not able through introspection to correct your own behavior, Shlomo's reminding us that sometimes "consequences" can be good incentives.
  - Metzudot sees the purge as relating to the punishment occurring in Olam Hazeh, thereby erasing the need for punishment in Olam Haba. Ibn Ezra sees this as creating an incentive to correct one's ways to avoid future punishments.

[2] Berachot 28b. Koren Talmud translation.

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

FALL INTO EARLY SHABBAT WITH US!

RSVP by 11/1!

Join us for the first early Shabbat dinner of the year as we *fall* into the Shabbat spirit!

Friday, November 6th after davening (~5:30pm)

Early Bird Pricing before 10/22:	**Pricing after 10/23:**
ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - $25	ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - $30
CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - $10	CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - $13
CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - $3	CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - $5
FAMILY MAX - $70	FAMILY MAX - $85

tinyurl.com/AAFall2026

events@ahavatachim.org

CONGREGATION AHAVAT ACHIM

PRESENTS

VETERAN'S DAY KIDDUSH

WE INVITE YOU TO HONOR THOSE WHO SERVED IN THE US ARMED FORCES BY ADDING A STAR TO OUR BOARD AND DONATING IN THEIR NAME TO OUR SPECIAL KIDDUSH ON NOVEMBER 14TH.

Since 1926, November 11th has been a day to remember both living veterans and those who have passed on. Join us as we honor and celebrate the selfless service of millions of veterans who have defended our freedoms and way of life by sharing the names of those who have served. The names will be displayed at the Kiddush.

SUBMIT NAMES OF VETERANS OR SPONSORSHIPS HERE.
TINYURL.COM/AAVETERANS2026

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

FOURTH ANNUAL
MIKVAH CHAVA FAIGA DINNER

A Community Evening of Unity

FAIR LAWN
MIKVAH
ASSOCIATION

November 21, 2026
8-10 PM
Doors open 7:30

Congregation
Shomrei Torah

$80 Early Bird
$95 After 11/9
NEW!
$72 for first time registrants

Sponsorship Opportunities Available

bit.ly/flmikvah2026

DINNER COMMITTEE

Stephanie Botvinik Carol Cohen Hodayah Felzenberg Lori Garfunkel Avigayil Geller Zahava Ginsberg Dani Goldberg Chaiy Haimovich Tziporah Koslowsky Dodi Lamm Jessica Listhaus Denise Miller Pamela Pollack Hendel Rosenfeld Shira Teichman Leora Weitzen Leora Vinagray

SCFL SEPHARDIC CENTER OF FAIR LAWN
YOUNG ISRAEL
ANSHEI LUBAVITCH אנשי ליובאוויטש
AHAVAT ACHIM קהלת אהבת אחים THE FAMILY SHUL
SHOMREI TORAH שומרי תורה
CONGREGATION DARCHEI NOAM OF FAIR LAWN, NJ

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

Start the day off with community and gratitude!









THANKSGIVING DAY FOOTBALL & PIE DONATION

November 26, 2026

9:30am – 11:30am:
Flag Football

12:00pm – 1:00pm:
Pie Donation to Police and Volunteer Ambulance Corp

TINYURL.COM/AATHXGIVING2026

EVENTS@AHAVATACHIM.ORG

CHILDREN'S CORNER
@
SEUDAH SHLISHIT

1ST-5TH GRADERS

10 QUESTIONS IN 10 MINUTES!

EXCLUSIVE KIDS TABLE
FEATURING TORAH QUESTIONS
WITH RABBI SHESTACK!
EARN TICKETS FOR PARTICIPATING!

RUNNING FROM 10/24 UNTIL PESACH

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

For kids of All Ages

EARN TICKETS! REDEEM PRIZES!

12 05693 3053 4

Earn tickets for attending groups & other shul events with your friends!
Bonus tickets from Rabbi Shestack for asking questions, giving Divrei Torah & more!

2nd grade & under can redeem a prize for each 25 tickets!

3rd grade + can redeem an amazon gift card for each 50 tickets!

AHAVAT ACHIM
קהלת אהבת אחים
THE FAMILY SHUL

Covenant & Conversation

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

Lech Lecha

WRITTEN BY RABBI SACKS IN 5768 (2007–2008)

The Heroism of Ordinary Life

> The Lord said to Abram: 'Go – from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house - to the land that I will show you.'
>
> Gen. 12:1

These words are among the most consequential in the history of humankind. In that very moment a new faith was born, one that has lasted for two-thirds of the course of civilisation and remains young and vigorous today. Not only did Abraham give rise to what today we call Judaism. He was also the inspiration of two other religions - Christianity and Islam - both of which trace their descent, biological or spiritual, to him, and which now number among their adherents more than half the six billion people on the face of the earth.[1]

There was no one like Abraham, yet the Torah is exceptionally understated in its account of him. As children we learned that he was the first iconoclast, the person who, while still young, broke the idols in his father's house. But this is a Midrash, a tradition, inferred from hints in the biblical text rather than from explicit statement. In the pure text of the Torah, we are told nothing of his childhood, youth, his early days with Sarah, or any other time before the moment when God spoke these fateful words to him.

From what we do know, Abraham does not fit any conventional image of the religious hero. He is not, like Noah, the sole survivor of a world hastening to its destruction. He is not, like Moses, a lawgiver and liberator. He is not like the later prophets, people who spent their life confronting kings, wrestling with their contemporaries and "speaking truth to power."

To be sure, he is a man of exemplary virtue. He welcomes strangers and gives them food. He fights a battle on behalf of the cities of the plain in order to rescue his nephew Lot. He prays for them in one of the greatest dialogues in religious literature. He patiently waits for a child and then, when the command comes, is willing to offer him as a sacrifice, only to discover that the God of truth does not want us to sacrifice our children but to cherish them. But if we were asked to characterise him with adjectives, the words that spring to mind – gentle, kind, gracious – are not those usually associated with the founder of a new faith. They are the kind of attributes to which any of us could aspire. None of us can be an Abraham, but all of us can take him as a role-model. Perhaps that is the deepest lesson of all.

In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling made the following comment:

> Not all cultures develop the idea of the heroic. I once had occasion to observe in connection with Wordsworth that in the rabbinical

1 These figures were accurate at the time of writing in August 2008, although today they would need adjusting when quoted, to account for the expanded world population.

> literature there is no touch of the heroic idea. The rabbis, in speaking of virtue, never mention the virtue of courage, which Aristotle regarded as basic to the heroic character. The indifference of the rabbis to the idea of courage is the more remarkable in that they knew that many of their number would die for their faith. What is especially to our point is that, as ethical beings, the rabbis never see themselves – it is as if the commandment which forbade the making of images extended to their way of conceiving the personal moral existence as well.

Trilling is not quite accurate. The rabbis did speak of courage, *gevurah*. But he is right to say that Judaism did not have heroes in the way the Greeks and other cultures did. A hero is one convinced of his own importance. He or she is conscious of playing a part on the world stage under the admiring gaze of their contemporaries. The rabbis, said Trilling, "would have been quite ready to understand the definition of the hero as an actor and to say that, as such, he was undeserving of the attention of serious men." Abraham is the paradigm of an unheroic hero, one who (in Maimonides' lovely phrase) "does what is right because it is right"[2] and not for the sake of popularity or fame. If we were to define Judaism in Abrahamic terms it would be the heroism of ordinary life, being willing to live by one's convictions though all the world thinks otherwise, being true to the call of eternity, not the noise of now. Which brings us to the key phrase, the first words of God to the bearer of a new covenant: *Lech Lecha*. Is there, already in these two words, a hint of what was to come?

Rashi, following an ancient exegetical tradition, translates the phrase as "journey for yourself" (Rashi, Gen. 12:1). He suggests that these words really meant, "Travel for your own benefit and good. There I will make you into a great nation; here you will not have the merit of having children." Sometimes we have to give up our past in order to acquire a future. God was already teaching Abraham that what seems like a sacrifice is, in the long run, not so. Abraham was about to say goodbye to the things that mean most to us – our land, our birthplace and our parents' homes, the places where we belong. It was a journey from the familiar to the unfamiliar, a leap into the unknown. To be able to make that leap involves trust – in Abraham's case, trust not in visible power but in the voice of the invisible God. At the end of it, however, Abraham would discover that he had achieved something he could not have done otherwise. He would give birth to a new nation whose greatness consisted precisely in the ability to live by that voice and create something new in the history of humankind. *Lech Lecha* therefore means more than "Go". It means, "Go for yourself."

Another midrashic interpretation takes the phrase to mean "Go with yourself" – meaning, by travelling from place to place you will extend your influence not over one land but many:

> When the Holy One said to Abraham, "Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house . . ." what did Abraham resemble? A jar of scent with a tight-fitting lid put away in a corner so that its fragrance could not go forth. As soon as it was moved from that place and opened, its fragrance began to spread. So the Holy One said to Abraham, "Abraham, many good deeds are in you. Travel about from place to place, so that the greatness of your name will go forth in My world."
>
> *Bereishit Rabbah 39:2.*

Abraham was commanded to leave his place in order to testify to the existence of a God not bounded by place – Creator and Sovereign of the entire universe. Abraham and Sarah were to be like perfume, leaving a trace of their presence wherever they went. Implicit in this Midrash is the idea that the fate of the first Jews already prefigured that of their descendants. They were scattered throughout the world in order to spread knowledge of God throughout the world. Unusually, exile is seen here not as punishment but as a necessary corollary of a faith that sees God everywhere. '*Lech lecha*' means "Go with yourself" – your beliefs, your way of life, your faith.

A third interpretation, this time more mystical, takes the phrase to mean, "Go to yourself." The Jewish journey, said R. David of Lelov, is a journey to the root of the soul. Only in the holy land, said R. Ephraim Landschutz, can a Jew find the source of his or her being. R. Zushya of Hanipol said, "When I get to heaven, they will not ask me, Zushya, why

2 *Hilchot Teshuvah*, Chapter 10, Law 2.

were you not Moses? They will ask me, Zushya, why were you not Zushya?" Abraham was being asked to leave behind all the things that make us someone else – for it is only by taking a long and lonely journey that we discover who we truly are. "Go to yourself."

There is, however, a fourth interpretation: "Go by yourself." Only a person willing to stand alone, singular and unique can worship the God who is alone, singular and unique. Only one able to leave behind the natural sources of identity can encounter God who stands above and beyond nature. A journey into the unknown is one of the greatest possible expressions of freedom. God wanted Abraham and his children to be a living example of what it is to serve the God of freedom, in freedom, for the sake of freedom. What does this mean?

Alasdair Macintyre once pointed out that there are two kinds of atheist: one who does not believe in God, and one for whom atheism itself is a kind of religion. Of the latter, some of the greatest examples were (lapsed, converted, or non-believing) Jews – most famously, Spinoza, Marx, and Freud. Instead of merely denying the truths of Judaism, they set out to provide systematic alternatives.

Fundamental to the Torah are two freedoms: the freedom of God and the freedom of human beings. God is not, in Judaism, an impersonal force. He acts (in creation, revelation, and redemption) on the basis not of necessity but of choice. In choosing to make humanity in His own image He endowed us, too, with choice. There is no such thing as fate or predestination. "I call heaven and earth to witness," said Moses, "that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life."

It was this that Spinoza, Marx, and Freud set out to challenge. Each sought to show that we are not free. Man is a predictable animal. Our nature and character are subject to quasi-scientific laws. There is a science of human behaviour as there is a science of atoms. History, personal or collective, is a form of inevitability. We are what we are because we could not be otherwise. Against this, Judaism is a living protest. Abraham and his children were summoned to a life of radical freedom – and it is this that is at the heart of God's threefold call.

Marx said that man is a product of social forces, themselves shaped by the interests of the ruling class, the owners of property of which the most significant is land. Therefore God said to Abraham, Leave your land.

Spinoza said that humans are made by innate instincts and biological drives (nowadays this is called genetic determinism) given by birth. Therefore God said to Abraham: Leave the circumstances of your birth.

Freud said that we are the way we are because of the traumas of childhood, the influence of our early years, our relationships and rivalries with our parents, especially our father. Therefore, God said to Abraham: Leave your father's house.

Lech Lecha means: Leave behind you all that makes human beings predictable, unfree, able to blame others and evade responsibility. Abraham's children were summoned to be the people that defied the laws of nature because they refused to define themselves as the products of nature (Nietzsche understood this aspect of Judaism particularly well). That is not to say that economic or biological or psychological forces have no part to play in human behaviour. They do. But with sufficient imagination, determination, discipline and courage we can rise above them. Abraham did. So, at most times, did his children.

Those who live within the laws of history are subject to the laws of history. Whatever is natural, said Maimonides, is subject to disintegration and decay. That is what has happened to virtually every civilisation that has appeared on the world's stage. Abraham, however, was to become the father of an *am olam*, an eternal people that would neither disintegrate nor decay. Therefore, it had to be a people willing to stand outside the laws of nature. What for other nations are natural – land, home, family – in Judaism are subjects of religious command. They must be striven for. They involve a journey. They are not given at the outset, nor can they be taken for granted. Abraham was to leave behind the things that make most people and peoples what they are, and lay the foundations for a land, a Jewish home, and a family structure responsive not to economic forces, biological drives, and psychological conflicts but to the word and will of God. *Lech Lecha* in this sense means being prepared to take an often-lonely journey: "Go by yourself."

To be Jewish, to be a child of Abraham, is to have the courage to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, whatever the idols and whichever the age. In an era of polytheism, that meant seeing the universe as the product of a single creative will – and therefore not meaningless but coherent, meaningful.

In an era of slavery, it meant refusing to accept the status quo in the name of God, instead challenging it in the name of God. When power was worshipped, it meant constructing a society that cared for the powerless: the widow, orphan, and stranger. During centuries in which the mass of humankind was sunk in ignorance, it meant honouring education as the key to human dignity and creating schools to provide universal literacy. When war was the test of humanity, it meant striving for peace. In ages of radical individualism like today, it means knowing that we are not what we own but what we share; not what we buy but what we give; that there is something higher than appetite and desire – namely the call that comes to us, as it came to Abraham, from outside ourselves, summoning us to make a contribution to the world.

The (non-Jewish) journalist Andrew Marr once wrote that Jews "really have been different; they have enriched the world and challenged it."[3] It is that courage to travel alone if necessary, to be different, to swim against the tide, to speak in an age of relativism of the absolutes of human dignity under the sovereignty of God, that was born in the words *Lech Lecha*. To be a Jew is to be willing to hear the still, small voice of eternity urging us to travel, move, go on ahead, continuing Abraham's journey toward that unknown destination at the far horizon of hope. First we hear of how he began his journey. Then we step forward to find our own destiny.

Around the Shabbat Table



- What does it mean to be a Jewish hero - without seeking recognition - and how do we find the courage to stand apart?
- While we are all influenced (and enriched) by our upbringing, circumstances, and the guidance of others and expectations of others, how can we balance this with the call to shape our own destinies?

› Find more from Rabbi Sacks at **www.rabbisacks.org**

3 Andrew Marr, *The Observer*, 14 May 2000.



Covenant & Conversation

FAMILY EDITION

INSPIRED BY THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

Lech Lecha: The Constant Journey

DEVELOPED BY SHOSH HILL

parsha recap

Lech Lecha begins with God speaking to Avram, telling him that he should go from his land, his birthplace, and his father's house to the land that God will show him. God continues by assuring Avram that he will become the father of a great nation, and that all who bless Avram will be blessed, and all who curse him will be cursed. Avram then ups and leaves, together with Sarai his wife, and Lot his nephew.

- Why do you think God told Avram to leave 'his land, his birthplace, and his father's house,' instead of simply telling him to leave?
- Do you think Avram would be scared to leave behind everything he knew?

a closer look

אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ

"To the land that I will show you."
(BEREISHIT 12:1)

RABBI SACKS TEACHES US:

'Each year we tell the story of Avraham's call from God to leave his home and travel to "the land that I will show you". I call that the journey into insecurity. Life has been insecure for Jews for four thousand years. We are still on that journey. A lot of people are struck by the history of Jewish suffering. I am always struck by the history of Jewish recovery from suffering. What gives people the strength to keep going? It is that feeling that you can face the future without fear if you know you are not alone.'

Source: Lech Lecha 15:1 - Commentary on the Koren Sacks Chumash.

moral matters

LET'S DISCUSS!

- Rabbi Sacks says **the Jewish journey of insecurity is still continuing**. What do you think this means, and why do you think Jewish people sometimes still face unfair treatment?
- If you hear someone saying something antisemitic, what could you do?
- What might happen **if you choose to speak up**, and conversely, what might happen if you choose to stay silent?
- Rabbi Sacks talks about the history of Jewish recovery from suffering. How does knowing that God is with us help us to **hold onto resilience in tough times**?

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