

Lech Lecha  
Shayna Herszage

Parshat Lech Lecha, essentially, is the parsha that jump-starts the era of the Avot.

The parsha begins with Avraham - at the time, Avram - being told to leave his land, his birthplace, the house of his father, to a land G-d will show him. Rashi's commentary brings the idea that Ur Kasdim was rephrased in three different ways in order to make the test harder - it's not easy to leave your home, or your family.

In return for Avram and Sarai's leap of faith, Avram is promised he will be the father of a great nation. In C'naan, he is told his children will inherit the land. Avram asks for a promise - Rashi tells us he was worried that the land was conditional, that his children could lose it.

When a famine hits C'naan, Avram, Sarai, and Lot - his nephew - leave for Egypt. There is a debate as to whether or not their solution was sinning.

Abarbanel believes that Avram had done the right thing. He hardly had much choice - he could go to the sinful land of Egypt, which had food, or he could stay in his own land, where he could die of thirst or starvation. In addition, Avram wasn't planning on living in Egypt. He would go back, once C'naan was suitable for living.

The Ran agrees. He says that Yaakov does the same thing, years later. If it is repeated, surely it is not a sin?

Ramban, however, says that Avram sinned. He argues that the famine was a test of faith, and he should have stayed in his promised land, and trusted G-d.

Upon entering Egypt, Avram tells Sarai that, due to her being beautiful - which the text says she "now" was - she should hide. Rashi brings three opinions on the use of "now":

- 1) Due to her modesty, he never really noticed her beauty.
- 2) Despite having travelled - which makes others disheveled - she looked beautiful.
- 3) Now her beauty is something to worry about.

In Egypt, she is found and taken to Pharaoh. So they do not kill Avram, she is told to say he is her brother, rather than husband. The Egyptians of Pharaoh's palace are struck with a plague, to the point that Avram and Sarai are escorted away with riches, in the hope that they won't return.

Lot and Avram, now wealthy in C'naan, struggle to agree on morals. Avram's shepherds prohibit the cattle grazing on the grass of others, while Lot allows his cattle to consume stolen grass.

Avram sends Lot away, to live anywhere far from him. Rashi says this is due to three reasons - Lot is drifting off the derech, the land can hardly support both their flocks with food and, because they look alike, adjacent nations may think Avram is stealing the grass, which could be a chillul Hashem. Lot goes to S'dom, which is similar to Egypt, according to Rashi, in both its fertility and its immorality.

In southern C'naan, a war breaks out between nations - four kings against five. Lot is kidnapped, thought to be Avram. When Avram hears of this, he fights the kings who kidnapped his nephew, and frees him.

After refusing the king of S'dom's offers of gifts of thanks, Avram is told by Hashem that he will be rewarded for his righteous ways. Avram asks G-d why he would need reward, if he has no children to inherit it. Hashem promises Avram that he will have children.

After being promised that he will have a nation in C'naan, Avram creates a sacrifice of several animals being halved, each half placed opposite the other on the mizbeach, and his walking through them. Rashi says that the animals used were to be standard sacrifices later on.

Additionally, the sacrifice is said to be a metaphor. Some animals were halved - these are meant to be the other nations, not quite whole. The birds, however, were left whole - representing the Jewish people. After the sacrifice, vultures swooped down on the cut animals. This is a metaphor for King David, in his efforts to "swoop down" on the other nations.

When Avram does the sacrifice, G-d tells him that his descendants will be oppressed in bondage for four centuries. He adds, however, that this time will end in wealth, and justice will come upon those who oppressed the descendants of Avram.

By this point, Avram and Sarai are old and childless. Sarai asks Avram to have a child with her maid, Hagar. She hopes to be "built up from her". Rashi explains this in a few ways - she hopes to be built up in joy from caring for a child, her legacy will be built, and she will be spiritually built up by the merit of bringing in this rival of hers.

Hagar, however, makes Sarai's happiness difficult. She oppresses Sarai, feeling that her fertility makes her better than Sarai. Sarai sends her away, but Hagar runs into an angel. The angel asks where she came from, and where she is going. Rashi teaches that this was not in the physical sense, but spiritual. "Why have you left the holiness of Avram's presence?"

She is told to return to Avram, and have her son, Ishamael. Ishmael will be wild, and despised by many. She returns and has her child. Soon afterward, Avram becomes Avraham - the father of a nation.

At the age of 99, Avraham is commanded to circumcise himself. He is told that, when he is circumcised, he will be perfect. But aren't humans incapable of perfection? Rashi explains this by saying that this perfection is in but one area of life- he will be spiritually perfect, in the eyes of Hashem.

An important aspect of this parsha is understanding and reaching toward potential, as shown by the tests given to Avraham. The name, Lech Lecha, means "go for yourself." This means the journey - hardship and all - was for Avraham's pleasure and benefit. This is because, when one chases the potential G-d gave them, they achieve happiness. When one strives to overcome the walls appearing to hold them back, they achieve greatness.

### Parshat Lech-Lecha, by Chana Engel

I stood there in the post office, a cardboard box in hand,  
I taped it up tightly, marking fragile all around.

And as I fingered it with care, making sure the box was tied,  
I imagined for a moment that I was wrapped inside.

"I don't talk in public", "I can't help getting angry",  
We all have things that limit us, what we can and cannot be.  
"I can't concentrate so long", "I'll simply never win",  
That's you crawling in that cardboard box and shutting yourself in.

But Hashem wants us to climb beyond, that's why He told Avram,  
Lech lecha, - go from yourself, your journey's just begun.  
Don't let your personal limitations tie you down to where you are,  
Take the liberty to step beyond, then you'll move very far.

But who says that I can climb out - maybe that's the way I am?  
It's my genetic makeup - hey don't mess with G-d's plan!  
I was raised a certain way, that's the path I was shown,  
How can I be expected to change all I've ever known?

So G-d tells us "Leave your country"; forget society's expectations,  
"Your birthplace"; your nature, your genetic limitations.  
Don't blame things on your upbringing - "Leave your father's home",  
Move beyond your history - become someone of your own.

Definitions tie us down, locked in comfort zone,  
We only broaden our horizons when we step out of what's known.  
I don't have to change a thing, I can remain as before,  
But why settle for second best when I can be so much more?

But don't shed your identity - that's what we aim to find,  
*Lech lecha* - go to yourself, but a *you* that's not confined.  
You have to leave the *you* you've always known, in your quest to find the *me*,  
Because sometimes who we always were restricts who we can be.

*Lech lecha* - go from yourself! Risk trying something new,  
*Lech lecha* - go to yourself! Find the hidden parts of you.  
*Lech lecha*- go for yourself, the gain is yours alone,  
Embark on this self-searching journey to find what's really home.

**What are some times you have pushed your limits toward great  
potential?**

**What do you think are common obstacles in daily lives?**

