

When I was rereading this week's Torah portion, Lech Lecha, I was struck by how much movement there is in it. The Torah portion begins with God's famous charge to Avram, whose name will later be changed to Abraham: Lech Lecha! Go forth from your land, your birthplace, from your father's house, to the land where I will show you. God promises that if follows God's instructions upon this journey, Avram will be blessed, he and his descendants.

The playing out of the blessing is not quite clear, at least not in this Torah portion. But there sure is a lot of travel. Avram, Sarai, nephew Lot and a whole retinue of unnamed servants travel first from Haran to Canaan, the promised land. They arrive in the north, in Shechem, but they do not settle there. The Hebrew says "va'yisa Avram haloch v'nasoah hanegbah." And Avram traveled back and forth in the general direction of the Negev. So it seems like Avram didn't exactly settle the land, but "sojourned" there, traveled around, grazing his flocks, in the Bedouin style.

And then there's a famine, and they up and travel to Egypt - this is all within the first 10 verses of the Torah portion, by the way.

The rest of the parasha sees them returning to Canaan from Egypt, travelling all over Canaan again, splitting from nephew Lot, fighting a war to rescue nephew Lot, and then finally settling-ish, at Mamre, around present-day Be'er Sheva.

In his commentary on Avram's travel down to Egypt, the medieval Spanish philosopher, Nachmanides, invokes a formula: *ma'asei avot siman l'vanim*. The deeds of the parents are a sign for the children. In this case, Nachmanides elaborates, Avram's descent into Egypt and troubles there were a sort of foreshadowing for the Israelite people's slavery and subsequent Exodus from Egypt. Or, in more contemporary psychological terms, Avram's journey set a pattern that was then played out in future generations.

Given the stereotype of the wandering Jew that exists to the day, I wonder if they concept extends beyond the generations of the Bible. How many people here were born in the same place that their parents were born? If you have children, how many of you saw your child birthed in the same place you were born? How many of you born in the same place that your grandparents were born?

I know that in my own case, my mother was born in New York but grew up in California. I was born in the midwest but grew up in New York. And I hope to sometime in the next few years bear children of my own here in Eugene. I may not be living a Bedouin lifestyle, but there is certainly a strong element of *haloch v'nasoah* - back and forth travel - in my own recent lineage.

The legacy of this pattern has been mixed for the Jewish people. We have been refugees all of the world. We have also been agents of cultural contact, all over the world. We have been alienated from a sense of belonging to land, even to the land of Israel, from which we were exiled for so long, and to which this week's parsha tells us our ancestors - Avram and Sarah were not indigenous in the first place.

But this is not meant to be a talk about where Jews belong. Plainly, we belong everywhere, as we have been everywhere.

When I read this parasha, and I think about the Jewish history of wandering, I see here a model of how not to get stuck.

I heard a teaching once from Rabbi Aryeh Ben David, then the director of the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem. He said that God is always broadcasting one message to everyone on earth, and that message is “Lech Lecha,” literally, go to yourself, or go, yourself!

That Avram and Sarah began the Jewish story by tuning into that Divine communication, and stepping out of all that was comfortable in order to do their own spiritual work.

And the first part of that is not getting stuck in the vision of the way things should be, but responding to the way things were - while still holding the vision. Shortly after they arrived in Canaan - the place where Hashem had promised that they would be blessed - there is a famine.

Rashi says that this was a test of Avram: Avram did not say, “well, here I am in Cana’an, and instead of a blessing, there’s a famine. Been nice talking with you, Hashem, but I’m out.” *Neither* did Avram stick his head in the sand and say, “well, Hashem promised me a blessing here, so even though there’s a famine, we are going to stay right here, and trust that Hashem will provide.” He was able to hold the vision of the Divine promise, while responding to the reality of the situation. He was able to take the steps that were possible to take, and not give up on the larger journey.

Maasei Avot siman l'vanim. The deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children.

So Avram and Sarai's behavior in this parasha - their willingness to respond both to their vision of where they should be as well as the reality of where they were - is supposed to be a template for their spiritual descendents.

So this parasha rolls around just after our routines have finally settled down and gotten comfortable after the High Holidays. And it comes to remind us that that "Lech Lecha" is still being broadcast out on the divine wavelength. Constantly, to each of us. It may not be telling us to physically leave our homes, but it is reminding us to examine where we are stuck, where we need to go, how we need to shake ourselves up in order to arrive at who we are meant to be. This work is never finished. But it starts with tuning in.

Lech Lecha is being broadcast, to each one of us. "Go to yourself! Go find yourself! Go be yourself." Don't be stuck in your idea of how things should be based on how they've been. Don't be stuck in your idea of who you are. Look around, see where you actually are - physically, spiritually, and rouse yourself in the direction of where you will need to go. The journey will likely look like Avram and Sarai's haloch v'nasoah - back and forth wanderings. It may not be clear exactly where you are going - but there will be blessing.