

Well, as I said on Rosh Hashanah, I have missed leading services, and I've missed this. My attention has been otherwise diverted in pretty wonderful ways, but it is great to be back with you all! Since I last gave a Friday evening dvar Torah (in mid August), my life has changed completely, in both expected and unexpected ways.

One of the unexpected ways is in how I relate to Torah. Since, as I teach my b'nei mitzvah students, I firmly believe that every single Torah portion contains insights that can inspire how we live our lives, now that I am a parent, I not only am internalizing the responsibility to learn and teach Torah in a whole new way. As we begin the yearly cycle this time, I find myself reading the weekly parshiyot with an eye towards what they can teach about parents and children.

We are now in Lech Lecha, the third parasha of Genesis. As I read Bereshit, the first parashah, this year, I imagined that those primordial stories of humans in the garden were about what it means to be an animal on this planet. As I read Noach last week, I imagined those stories of flood and survival, of the tower and the limits of human ambition, were about what it means to be a human. And this week, as we encounter the story of Abraham, the archetypal first Jew, must be the introduction of what it means to be a Jew.

This Torah portion starts with a message to Avram, who will later be called Abraham. *Lech Lecha* - Go forth! Leave your land, your birthplace, your father's home! Says the very first verse of the text.

Based on the fact that the parashah begins with this line, you might reasonably assume that Avram was commanded to make a break with his past, to start something entirely new.

Certainly, the midrashim about the life of young Avram play it out that way; they posit that Avram's father, Terach was actually an idol maker and seller, and that Avram, in his flash of monotheistic insight, smashed his father's idols, becoming the first literal iconoclast..

But if the Torah portion had begun a few verses earlier, we might understand the whole story of Abram in a different light.

For the last verses of the previous parashah, Genesis 11:31 and 32 read, "Terach took his son Avram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Avram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan, but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there. The days of Terach came to 205 years; and Terach died in Haran."

The subsequent verse is the beginning of Chapter 12, the *Lech Lecha* verse. But by the time Avram receives the "Lech Lecha command," he has already left his birthplace, with the promised land of Canaan as his destination, in the company of his father. In light of the previous verses, we see that Hashem is not commanding that Avram make a radical break with the past, but rather that Avram complete the journey his father began.

Now, many of the Torah commentators hasten to say that it was actually Avram's vision that drove the journey. But Chassidic commentator *haamek Davar* teaches, based on the verses I just quoted, that Terach himself noticed from afar the sanctity of the land of Canaan, and thus began the journey.

Terach may have been an idolater, as the midrash suggests, and Avram may have broken with his practices, but Terach also had some sort of spiritual insight that was clearly contiguous, shall we say, with the insight his son continued to pursue after his death. And even if it was Avram's insight that drove the journey, it was a journey on which his father walked with him, at least partway, at least until his own death.

So the dynamic between Avram and his father is not monochromatic. Not just a rebel, destroying his father's idols, Avram was also the loyal son, who, depending on which midrash you prefer, either followed his father or brought his father along on his own journey, and in either case, after his father's death, continued the journey towards the destination they had sought together.

*Maasei Avot siman l'vanim*, medieval commentator Nachmanides teaches: The deeds of the parents are a sign for the children. Avram's deeds are supposed to be a sort of blueprint for the Jewish people who come after him. So from the beginning of his journey, we learn, perhaps, about the fuzzy boundaries between the generations, the delicate negotiations between parents and children. Like Avram, each generation must smash the idols of the previous generation, and seek to journey farther than the destinations their parents reached. But somehow, Avram did these things without alienating his father. Somehow, at the of Terach's life, they were still journeying together. Avram is a model for integration, rather than rejection of the past, so like Avram, perhaps each generation should ideally seek to bring the previous generation with them on the journey, as far as possible.

But for me, of course, this is all terribly personal. I am now not just a daughter, but a newly besotted mother. Whereas before I would read this from the perspective of Avram, right now, it's all about Terach for me. Perhaps not surprisingly, as I consider this story, I wonder how it feels to be Terach on his deathbed, considering this son who perhaps caused a great deal of trouble in his youth, who perhaps destroyed some of the things that were most important to Terach, but who journeyed alongside him in his final years. Did Terach perhaps have a sense that Avram would indeed live up to his name Av-ram, exalted father, to become the father of nations? Did the name the Terach had given his son reflect his hopes, or his vision for him? Did Terach feel pride? Did he feel satisfaction, knowing that Avram would continue his journey, or bitterness about the ways in which Avram had broken from his traditions? Did he feel a little bit of both? We could tell the story in any of those ways.

And Avram himself, did he feel that he was honoring or defying his father, as he set out to continue the journey, or both?

I appreciate asking these questions on the Shabbat of a bat mitzvah. For you, Jeremy and Clara, whose spiritually journeys have brought you here, I hope that you can enjoy watching and participating in Elizabeth's continuing journey.

And for myself, as I watch Adar grow, I hope that I, too, can learn from Terach. I hope that I can have patience as I watch her reject things I hold dear, as she almost certainly will at various points. I hope I can have faith in her as she reaches beyond what I can see. I hope that I stick with her on the journey as far as I can. And I hope that however she winds up telling her story, the record will show that we walked together.