



Around the Shabbat Table

Lech Lecha 5763
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Shalom!



Introduction

This week's *parasha* marks the place in our tradition where the "rubber meets the road." The universal lessons of Bereshit and Noah now pivot on the faith of one man, Abraham.

In *parashat* Lech Lecha, the covenant (special agreement or contract) is established between God and Abraham. God calls upon Abraham (who, at this point, is still named Abram) to leave the land of his birth and to travel to an unknown land which God will show him, a land that has been set aside for him and his descendants. Abram answers God's call and takes his wife Sarah (still known as Sarai) and his nephew Lot with him as he leaves Haran and journeys to Canaan.

Parashat Lech Lecha follows Abram's journey, including his sojourn into Egypt to escape a famine in Canaan. Before sending Abram from Egypt, He afflicts Pharaoh with plagues.

Returning to the land of Canaan, Abram and Lot graze their flocks together only to realize that the land cannot sustain both of them. Lot chooses to live on the Plain of Jordan while Abram remains in Canaan. During a war between local tribes, Lot is taken away as a hostage. Abram and his men pursue the men who have kidnapped Lot, freeing him, his possessions and the other prisoners who had been taken.

God once again appears to Abram and reiterates the promise that his descendants would become a great nation. The covenant between God and Abram is reaffirmed. God also foretells of the Israelite bondage in Egypt.

Despite God's assurance, Abram's faith continues to be tested. How can his descendant's become "a great nation" when he and Sarai have no children? Because she has not been able to bear children, Sarai gives her handmaid Hagar to Abram as a concubine. Hagar gives birth to a son, Ishmael. God repeats His covenant to Abram, but now requires Abram and all the males in his household to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant.

To signify Abram and Sarai's status as the parents of a great nation, God changes their names to Abraham and Sarah.

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

As your family shares a meal this Friday night, you might want to discuss the following questions:

1. There seems to be a very clear connection between the events in this *parasha* and an important Jewish holiday. Can you find the connections? Sometimes events and themes seem to recur in different *parashiot*. Do you find that important events and lessons recur in your life?
2. How many times does God establish and reaffirm the covenant with Abraham? Do you think some numbers have greater significance than others? Why?
3. God changing Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah seems to indicate that names are very important. Why do you have the name that you have? Do you have a nickname that seems to capture your "nature" even better than your given name?

A Text to Wrestle With

In the *parasha*, God calls upon Abram to leave his home and his family and travel to a faraway land:

- ☆ Now the Lord said unto Abram: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee." (Genesis 12:1).

Did it take a great faith and courage for Abram to answer God's call? Do you think that the experience of an immigrant is anything like Abram's? Why or why not?

Towards an Action Agenda

Coming to a new place is always difficult, even with the faith that God is leading you. Find out if there are immigrants in your school and learn a little about their backgrounds. Think of ways that you can help them feel comfortable and safe rather than new and vulnerable.

- ☆ *Hachnasat Orchim* (welcoming of strangers) is taken seriously in many communities. Check with your synagogue to see how it takes care of visitors, and volunteer to help out as well.
- ☆ One community that eagerly welcomes guests (because it has so many Jewish travelers) is that of Hong Kong. Learn about their fulfillment of the mitzva of hachnasat orchim at <http://www.ujc.org.hk/rabbi.htm>

Shabbat Shalom!

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: <http://www.bjeny.org/>

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