

Hearing the Command to go Forth
Parashat Lech Lecha 5783
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During this time of year, I am continually struck by the beauty of the trees. I have appreciated [this website](#), which tracks the changing of the leaves throughout the Hudson Valley. The autumn foliage is a reminder of the unique patterns of creation that are ever-present, noticeable to those who are paying attention to their presence. I find myself spending more time outside and basking in the glow of the leaves, remembering the ephemeral nature of this beauty and reflecting on the line from Psalms, “How manifold are your works, God, you have fashioned them all with your wisdom, the world is full of Your creations.” (104:24) Seeing the grandeur of nature reminds me to be grateful for the gift of life and connects me with my ancestor, Abraham.

This week’s *parashah*, introduces us to Abram, later known as Abraham, who is unique in his awareness of God’s role as master of the universe. He is, according to a midrash, the first person to recognize God as maintaining a presence in the world both when it is on fire as well as overseeing the glow of its potential. (Genesis Rabbah 39:1) God commands Abram, “*Lekh lekha me’artzekha*.” “Go forth from your land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” (Gen. 12:1)

According to the *Sefat Emet*, R’ Yehuda Leib Alter of Gur, one of the pillars of Chassidic thought from 19th century Poland, this command is not only given to Abraham. In fact the call to “go forth” is sent forth from God at all times. However, most people can’t hear it because they aren’t listening for it. Abraham hears the call and receives the message. He lives with an awareness of an omnipresent God. He, therefore, recognizes the profundity of this knowledge in the natural world and in every living being, which contains within it the breath of God. What might it look like if we could learn from Abraham’s example and see the world and other human beings in this way?

In a letter he once wrote to a colleague in 1969, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel explains God’s command to Abram to “go forth from your land” as a directive to change one’s perspective from a self-centered earthiness to one that sees the earth from God’s perspective. If one looks at a star from earth, the star seems very tiny. However if one sees it from heaven’s perspective it is of vast magnitude, of marvelous meaning. God blesses Abraham, “Look toward heaven and number the stars...So shall your descendants be.” (Gen. 15:5) God’s blessing to Abraham is that his descendants will be endowed with the ability to see from God’s perspective.

We too are challenged to see the infinite significance of every human being who has been put here on earth for a purpose- each as a star from Heaven’s perspective. It can be easy to become self absorbed in the business of life and become overwhelmed with the tasks that each day brings. It can be easy to miss the beauty in the trees as we are moving so quickly in the world. However, as descendants of Abraham we are challenged to see the world through a different lens. Perhaps if we try to see this way, we can learn to appreciate the beauty all around us as well as to feel the weight of moral responsibility that compels us to act for the sake of our fellow human beings.

Shabbat shalom