



Torah Reflections on *Parashat Lech Lecha*

Genesis 12:1 – 17:27

13 Heshvan, 5770 October 31, 2009

Lech Lecha; go forth. This is one of the most potent Torah portions in our tradition. God tells Abraham to leave all that he knows and go forth to a place he does not know. It is, in the most physical sense, a paradigmatic example of a leap of faith. How interesting it is that God, in telling Abraham to leave what he knows, says to go “forth”; that is to move in a way that is forward moving, to the future. How many times do we think that leaving something we know to something we don’t know will in fact leave us moving backward? Here the commandment assumes something positive; albeit unknown. In some ways being in a hospital room, a nursing home, or other care facility is moving from a place one has known to a place that is not yet known. We may be waiting for a test result, recovering from surgery, adjusting to a new home. All of it places us on the frontier of a new terrain. All of it asks us to leave something of what we have known and to live in something we don’t quite yet understand. How difficult that can be.

Still, most of us do have some experience with going to unknown places. When we plan a vacation, we use the tools we have to make transportation plans. We select a place to stay, we may even book a tour guide. We may read about the place we are going to, or we may just go and spontaneously decide how to enjoy the location each and every day. Slowly we become familiar with a place, we get to know a street, or a particular tourist attraction. And eventually we gain memories we share when we return home. Being in a difficult place like a hospital room can be similar. Part of the difficulty is that we don’t always have the tools to help us navigate the new terrain.

And this is where the tools of our tradition can act as guides into the unknown. First, it is important to ask ourselves, where is God in all of this? Just that simple question allows us to use the power of prayer. After all, in Jewish tradition, prayer is both self-reflection and conversation with God. Second, any self-reflection leads to some insights. The insight might be that we need someone to talk to. It might give us some other answer, or lead us to a deeper question to contemplate. Second, we can use the variety of Jewish prayer and ritual to frame our experience. It might be important to visit a mikvah after a hospitalization and experience both the spiritual power of water and the framework of ritual purification. And finally, we can extend ourselves in some way that is of help to another. Even a pleasant “hello” to a hospital employee is an important mitzvah because it acknowledges the most fundamental Jewish value that we are created uniquely in God’s image and therefore treat one another with the same respect with which we would treat God.

It is difficult to go from a place we know to a place that is unknown. It is challenging to explore and to get to know a new and different terrain. Yet, it is often living on the edge of the unknown that moves us to deeper levels of faith and from that to deeper places of knowing. In what ways will you, just for this day, go forth?

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