

Lech Lecha: Trusting and Wavering

Silent Center of Things

5775 Text Study by Yael Shy

Lech Lecha: Go forth.

Keep going.

I know you aren't sure where you are going. I'll be with you there. I'll show you the place. You are going to be a blessing. You are going to be blessed. I know you can't understand how right now, and that's okay. In time you will. Just go forth.

The journey begins Abraham and Sarah. Staying put is not an option so they pack up their lives, leave everything they know, and venture into unknown territory with all the faith they can muster in God's promise for them.

It only takes three short chapters and a few dicey, near death experiences, however, for Abraham to start to question this journey. "You say I'm going to be a blessing and the father of a huge nation," Abraham says to God, "but I'm old and don't have any children. How is this going to be possible?" You can almost feel the ache of frustration in his voice - the wavering, the exhaustion and the confusion. "I know you are telling me I'm loved and I'm important and great things will happen to me," Abraham says, "but can we speed it up a little? Exactly when are these blessings supposed to happen?"

I've always identified with this side of Abraham – the side that wants to trust, that wants to believe that he is going to be okay, but still wavers. Martin Buber writes: "All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware." Not being in control of the destination, however, can be terrifying.

When my last relationship began, I remember being in the panicky early stages, afraid all the time, unsure if it would work out, afraid that I would mess it up. My sister told me that I just needed to breath and trust. "But how can I trust him?" I asked, "there is every possibility he may leave me." The ground I was standing on felt thin and insecure. "Don't trust *him*," my sister responded, "trust yourself. Trust life."

Trust life. It seems so simple but is so difficult in practice.

How does Abraham do it?

Throughout the chapter, Abraham trusts and then wavers, trusts and then wavers. God doesn't get angry or impatient with Abraham in the wavering moments, and yet Abraham is not given a precise explanation of how his life will unfold. He is not given a map or the timeline or the greater meaning of his struggles.

Instead, God keeps giving Abraham puzzling, impossible instructions.

14. And the Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Please raise your eyes and see, from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward.

יד. ויהוה אָמַר אֶל אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הִפָּרֵד לוֹט מֵעִמּוֹ שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שָׁם צָפֹנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְקִדְמָה וַיְמִינָה:

15. For all the land that you see I will give to you and to your seed to eternity.

טו. כִּי אֵת כָּל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה רֹאֶה לְךָ אֶתְנַנֶּה וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ עַד עוֹלָם:

17. Rise, walk in the land, to its length and to its breadth, for I will give it to you."

יז. קוּם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּאָרֶץ לְאֶרְכָּהּ וּלְרֵחְבָּהּ כִּי לְךָ אֶתְנַנֶּה:

(Chapter 13: 14-15, 17)

5. And [God] took [Abraham] outside, and [God] said, "Please look heavenward and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And [God] said to him, "So will be your seed."

ה. וַיּוֹצֵא אוֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הִבֵּט נָא הַשָּׁמַיְמִימָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם תּוּכֵל לְסַפֵּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה זֶרְעֶךָ:

(Chapter 15:5)

What God seems to be asking Abraham to do is to exist outside the realm of what his small mind can understand. God is giving Abraham a *koan* – a question that cannot be answered through logical reasoning. Walk the length and breadth of an enormous stretch of land that ends only where your vision ends. Count the stars. *Trust* that a 100 –year-old woman can have a baby. *Koans* cannot be solved through thinking – they must be solved only through trusting and living life itself. God is telling Abraham to stop trying to predict or figure out or gain control of what that which he is not in control.

Alan Moranis writes that trust (*bitachon*), “gives us the capacity to act from a place of no fear. A heart cannot hold both fear and trust at the same time. When we cultivate trust, we inevitably loosen the grip fear holds on our heart.” (*Everyday Holiness*, 216).

It works. Towards the end of the chapter, “[Abraham] trusted in the Unnamable One” (וַיֵּאֱמֶן בַּיהוָה) (Genesis 15:6). Abraham lets go of trying to understand and control the future, and in that release he finds God, and life, holding him.

Does trust precede letting go, or does letting go precede trust? I think a little of both, but like Abraham, we don't need to be born with trust, and it doesn't need it to be ironclad. Trusting a little at a time, finding ourselves supported when we stop struggling against life, we learn to trust life a little bit more.

Practice Guidance

In meditation this week, and as you walk through your day, notice how the world supports you. Notice the feeling of your body as you sit, supported by a chair, or the earth. Notice how gravity, and your skeleton, supports each step while walking, or standing. As you inhale and exhale, practice letting go of that which you do not need, and finding the support that was there for you all along.

Step Five: As you locate dry land, move gently.

It takes fourteen days from the time the rains end to the time Noah sets foot back on dry land. Elizabeth Swados, author of the graphic novel, *My Depression* describes this period of time as “surviving a little at a time.” She illustrates small things like the ability to taste tomato sauce, thread a needle, or hear a bird as signposts of this gentle return to recovery. When she makes it through the bout of depression, she illustrates a triumphant picture of herself doing the splits, saying “remember, you got through this once, you can do it again!”

The rainbow – that bent shape of beautiful light – is our version of this triumphant picture. We made it! And once we’ve made it through total destruction, future storm clouds won’t look so ominous. We’ve made it before, we can do it again.