

Devar Torah (Sermon) For Lech Lecha
10/23/04 8 Cheshvan 5765

וַיֹּאמֶר ד' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה:
God said to Abram: Go from your land, your birthplace and the house of your father to the land that I will show you.

בראשית פרק יב:א Gen 12:1

Well, that's a little vague! Where did you say I was going again? I know what I'm leaving - my land, my birthplace, my father's house. I'm leaving everything I know. And . . . where am I going? Oh. You'll show me that later. Great. That's reassuring.

About to embark on a spiritual journey that will change his whole life, God doesn't even tell Abram where he is going. Why not? The Midrash asks why God did not reveal to Abraham the destination of this trip. Genesis Rabbah (Ch. 39 & 55) explains: כְּדֵי לַחֲבֹבָה בְּעֵינָיו וּלְתֵן לוֹ שָׂכָר: *in order to make it precious in his eyes, and to give him reward for each and every step.* Not knowing his destination, Abram would have to constantly look to God for instruction. And each step of the way had its own reward.

Perhaps this is true about every spiritual journey. As a person grows and develops in their spirituality, one cannot be certain where one will end up. Each day presents us with new realizations, new ways to understand God's world. New inspiration and new challenges. But it is because of this that, like Abraham, each and every step closer to God can be so rewarding.

An example: As many of you know, I did not grow up halachically observant. Nor did a light switch get flipped one day which magically turned me into a halachic Jew. Getting to where I am today was a journey. From the time I first decided to wear tsitsit daily, to the time when I decided to no longer eat non-kosher food, to the time that I started to observe the Sabbath. There were many steps along the way, and I suppose there are an infinite number of steps that remain for me to take. But with each step I made, I could never be sure where it would lead me. Would I keep it up? Would I take a step back? When I started to pray three times a day - would it make me feel a more permanent connection to God - would it lead me to observe even more, or would I be frustrated by failing to live up to that commitment? Or perhaps doing too much would lead me to burnout. I did not know. But carefully, and slowly I took each step. And hopefully I will continue to do so. Like everyone, I do not know what my final destination will be on my personal spiritual journey. But with each step, I believe there can be great reward.

Today we remember the day that the journey began. When God told Abraham לֵךְ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה: *go to the land which I will show you.* And so, today I hope you will take a step on your own journey. What will be your destination? There is no way of knowing. God hasn't revealed that. But like Abraham we all know we are capable of taking one step. And we know there is *שָׂכָר עַל כָּל פְּסִיעָה וּפְסִיעָה* *reward for each and every step.* So, take a step. Hopefully it will be one step in a lifelong march. But at least take one step. Say one more *ברכה* (*beracha*, blessing) on the food you eat. Eat one more kosher meal. Join us tonight for mincha as we conclude this shabbat with prayer, song and study. The list of options is endless. Choose one. לֵךְ לְךָ (*lech lecha*) - take one step.