

**This Week In Torah *Lech L'cha***  
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The first step of a journey is the hardest. For Abraham, he had to leave all the things that ensured a sense of security. Equipped only with faith as a map, he stepped off to follow a path that was not defined. He had to trust. A few chapters later [next week's *parasha*] he is asked to do it again—go to a place that is undefined but this time, he is commanded to offer his son Isaac up as a sacrifice. Trust. Faith.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Rabbinic sage known as the Sefat Emet wrote that Abraham had yielded with “complete surrender” unto God. He described the journey, not as a risky adventure but one that pointed to an understanding of incompleteness with a human soul. To move forward, trust is beyond the rational and is in the realm of God. God set the stage for Abraham; now Abraham had to step onto it and improvise if he must but go forth. Here the Sefat Emet described that sense of self yields to faith; trust in God supersedes the certainty and predictability. He added a quote from Psalms [45:10]: “Listen, O daughter, and note, incline your ear; forget your people and your father’s house...” For this sage, that is a reminder that this is not only a command to Abraham, but all of us as well. Our faith in God compels us to step into the unknown with a trust that we are not alone—just as Psalm 23 tells us: “Though I walk through the valley of death, I have no fear; for You are with me...”

The 20<sup>th</sup>-century Rabbinic scholar, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchek [known as the Bostoner Rebbe] spoke of a parallel image occurring later on in the *sedra*. Soloveitchek wrote that Abraham was too set in his ways and in order for his faith to reach a new plateau, he needed to surrender the security of place and property to understand the truest meaning relationship is not with materialism and status but with God. A few chapters later, Abraham’s faith plateaued again and this time, Abraham was told to perform the *mitzvah* of *brit milah*, ritual circumcision. Abraham was reluctant because it would separate him from others; he felt he was unable to fulfill his destiny as a prophet. Soloveitchek proved his point by playing with the name of God—in this case, *El Shadai* [the God of the breast]. He broke it into 3 different words—the God that is enough. For Soloveitchek, we need another to move us in our spiritual growth. A student needs a teacher, a person needs God.... And a son needs a parent to perform *brit Milah*. This ritual is a gift—a parent to complete the task of creation by removing the foreskin on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. A parent becomes God’s partner in the work of creation.

In order for this to occur, there needs to be awareness. Abraham had to hear God speak. Next week, he acknowledges that command through the phrase “*Hineini*” but this week, he acknowledges by doing. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitobsk said that majesty of Abraham’s faith was rooted in his willingness to hear God. The foundation of faith, he said, is found through the “awakening from within so that the windows of heaven are open.” Ah, faith comes to those who desire it.

Let me hit pause here for a second and summarize this: Abraham desired to have faith; curious to a world beyond. Yet, Abraham seemed set in his ways. He needed to take a risk and trust in order for his faith to grow. The journey began. He needed assurance beyond the self in order to blossom. That was a gift; one that can be shared from one to another—especially parent to child. But like all gifts, the joys are not only in the giving—there is a strong sweetness in the receiving, especially when it is desired.

For us—that is the spiritual journey we undertake. Take a chance to push yourself; do not remain complacent with where you are. Grow through inviting another to encourage you—an author of a good book, a teacher, your rabbi, a friend, a family member—let that other hold you as you step up to a greater sense of spiritual heights. The poet Mari Evans said it this way: “I will bring you a whole person and you will bring to me a whole person and we will have twice as much of love and everything.”

The first step of the journey you take is yours. But remember, you are not alone.