



# The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Bereshit

Parshat Lech Lecha

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## Life is a Continuous Journey

By David Goldschmidt

This week's *parsha* begins with God commanding *Avraham*\* to leave his home and go to a place that God will show him. Not only does God ask *Avraham* to leave his homeland, but He also doesn't even tell *Avraham* where he will be going. *Avraham* immediately acquiesces to God's commandment, portraying *Avraham* as a man of great faith. But did this really demonstrate *Avraham's* unbridled faith? While it is surely hard to leave one's country, God did dangle a reward in front of *Avraham* if he complied with God's commandment. *Avraham* and *Sarah* did not have children, and God promised him that He would make him into a great nation if he followed God.

Did faith in God motivate *Avraham*, or did he simply have little to lose and everything to gain by listening to God's instructions? Was *Avraham* actually motivated by God's promise of a reward?

*Did faith in God motivate Avraham, [to leave his father's house] or did he simply have little to lose and everything to gain by listening to God's instructions? Was Avraham actually motivated by God's promise of a reward?*

According to Rabbi David Fohrman, we can better understand *Avraham's* actions and motivations by linking this passage with God's command to *Avraham* in the story of the *Akedah*, which has a similar structure.

Consider these parallels:

- Both stories uses the same action words — לֶךְ-לְךָ, *lech lecha*.
- In our *parsha* three different adjectives are used to describe Abraham's birthplace: מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וּמִמְּקוֹלְדֵי תָהָה, וּמִבְּיַת אָבִי, *from your land, from your relatives and from your father's house.* (*Bereshit* 12:1) In the *Akedah*, the Torah uses three adjectives to describe Isaac: קוֹחֵ הַנֶּחֱלָה, אֶת-בְּנִי, אֶת-יְחִידִי, *Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love.* (22:2)
- God commands *Avraham* to go to an unknown destination in each story. Our *parsha* says, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה, *to the land that I will show you.* (12:1). In two weeks we will read the instruction *Avraham* receives before the *Akedah*: עַל אֶחָד הַהַרְיִים אֲשֶׁר אֶמַּר אֵלֶיךָ, *on one of the heights that I will point out to you.* (22:2)
- Both stories conclude with the same action sequence: *Avraham* getting to his destination, building an altar, and making a sacrifice to God.

\* When our *parsha* begins, his name was *Abram*, and his wife's name was *Sari*; for simplicity, we will refer to them as *Avraham* and *Sarah* throughout. The name change occurs in verse 17.

The importance of these similarities is found in the one significant difference between them: in our *parsha Avraham* is promised a reward for listening to God. But in the story of the *Akedah*, *Avraham* is not promised anything — he is simply told to sacrifice his precious son. In this instance, *Avraham* intends to obey the order without question simply because God told him.

Ironically, by obeying God's command to sacrifice Isaac, he would be negating the very reward that God had previously promised, making him the father of a great nation. Nevertheless, *Avraham* does not question God's request and dutifully brings his beloved child, Isaac, to be sacrificed. *Avraham* demonstrated total faith and devotion to God.

I believe that these two passages highlight the development of *Avraham's* faith and devotion to God. In the first instance, he heard God's calling, and he followed it. It's unclear, but perhaps he needed a reward to push him to leave his birthplace and family. That decision, whatever the motivation, was the first step in *Avraham's* journey that ultimately led him to an even greater sense of commitment to God.

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By the time of the *Akedah*, *Avraham's* faith and devotion to God were so strong that he was fully committed to serving God — even to the point of sacrificing his beloved son without the promise of a reward. *Avraham's* personal journey of serving God in the years since God asked him to leave his father's home brought him to a point whereby he no longer needed the motivation of a reward.

Like *Avraham*, we all experience a personal journey that molds us. Our individual experiences are important; they shape us and give us perspective. Some journeys may be more interesting than others, and some may have more twists and turns. Although each of our journeys is unique, the ultimate goal for each of us is the same -- to elevate our faith and relationship with God, just like *Avraham*. As the new year begins, may we all be empowered to continue our personal journeys to enrich our lives as well as the lives of our families and community so we can follow *Avraham's* example in service to God.

**David** and Ellen's journey began in Brooklyn, where they met at the Yeshiva of Flatbush High School. They each traveled separately to Manhattan for college and law school. They lived on the UWS for a few years and then moved to Scarsdale where they raised their three children, Daniel (married to Rachel), Joshua, and Allison. The commute to YofF was too long so the children were educated at WDS and Ramaz. David and Ellen have been members of YIS for over 27 years. Like all of us, their journey continues. . . .

*Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?*

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