

Will You Walk in the Footsteps of Abraham?

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Whenever we bravely stand up for what we believe is just and right, we walk in the footsteps of Abraham. Whenever we tackle life's uncertainties and unknowns with a calm and adventurous spirit, we walk in the footsteps of Abraham. Whenever we take necessary risks with courage and face our fears head on and overcome them, we walk in the footsteps of Abraham. May we all choose to walk in Abraham's footsteps. For when we do, we bring blessing to our family, blessing to our house of God, and blessing to our world.

Let's learn Torah together. The Torah portion for this Shabbat is called *Lekh lekchah*. It describes God's election of Abraham to be the founder of a new religion and a new people.

Let's look carefully at what God asks Abraham to do. We read in Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1-2: "Adonai said to Abram, 'Go forth from your native land, from your kin group, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.'"

What God asked Abraham to do was no easy task. Indeed, it was an enormous challenge requiring enormous courage. For example, please look at the text and tell me if Abraham knew he was going to the land of Israel. Notice that God does not specify where Abraham is to go – only to "the land that I will show you". So Abraham heard God's call, but he had no idea where he was going! Imagine yourself setting out on a journey like that into the unknown.

What else had God asked of Abraham? Notice the ascending order of difficulty. God asked Abraham to leave behind everything he had learned from Mesopotamian culture, everything he knew from his ethnic group, even everything he had learned from his parents.

And Abraham said yes. He would do it all. Why did Abraham accept such a difficult challenge? Why did he accept the call? The Torah tells us absolutely nothing about Abraham's motivation. We must turn to the Midrash, the imaginative world of rabbinic interpretation of the biblical text. And what the Midrash teaches us is that even before God had elected Abraham, Abraham had already chosen God. Abraham questioned the polytheistic beliefs and the idolatrous practices of the Mesopotamian culture into which he was born.

One of the most famous legends goes like this:

Abraham's father, Terakh, was a maker of idols, idols that people worshipped. One day, Terakh put Abraham in charge of his idol-making store. While Terakh was away, Abraham took a hammer and smashed all the statues and figurines in the store. When Terach returned and saw the mess, Abraham told his father that the idols had done it to themselves. In response Terach said, "That's ridiculous. Idols cannot move!" To which Abraham replied, "Then why do you sell them? And why do people worship them?"

In daring contrast to the polytheistic beliefs of his culture, Abraham asserted his belief in the one God. Even more significantly, while Mesopotamian theology taught that humanity is merely a slave to do the bidding of the Gods and nothing more than a toy with whom the Gods play, Abraham insisted that the God he worshipped is an ethical being, a being who loves God's creation and who always acts morally and justly toward humanity.

In discovering the God who lives, loves, and cares, Abraham chose the God of ethical monotheism. In choosing Abraham, God picked a man who had the ability to bring blessing to the world and the capacity to lead a people charged with the God-given responsibility to be a moral exemplar to the world, always doing *tzedakah umishpat*, always doing what is just and right.

There is much inspiration that can be derived from this Torah portion. From *parashat lekh lekha* we learn that whenever we bravely stand up for what we believe is just and right, we walk in the footsteps of Abraham. Whenever we tackle life's uncertainties and unknowns with a calm and adventurous spirit, we walk in the footsteps of Abraham. Whenever we take necessary risks with courage and face our fears head on and overcome them, we walk in the footsteps of Abraham.

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