

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

LECH L'CHA

G-d appeared to Avram and said to him: "...Your name shall no longer be Avram, but Avraham". (17:1,5)

The Baal HaTurim claims that heaven and earth were created in the merit of Avraham Avinu. "These are the products of heaven and earth B'HIBAR'AM (2:4), when He created them. Rearrange HIBAR'AM and you get Avraham. The entire Creation happened in Avraham's zechut.

Let's add. Observe that the HEI in HIBAR'AM is a specially small one. Drop that small HEI and rearrange, and you get Avraham's previous name, Avram. We can say that it was only after many years of his EMUNA, chesed, and influence that G-d raised his given name Avram to the spiritually higher name Avraham. So, that HEI in his name was a later addition, and thus by tradition it appears in a different size to the rest of the Torah text. This illustrates that Avraham was not born with the merit of the world being created for him; but that he subsequently earned that merit by prompting G-d to reflect that the creation of the heavens and the earth was worth it after all. As Pirkei Avot reminds us: The world was created in 10 declarations... there were 10 generations from No'ach to

Avraham to teach us that all those generations provoked him until Avraham Avinu came and received the reward that they all potentially could have earned (Avot 5:1,3).

So Avraham's greatness did not come from his background, but from his journey. LECH L'CHA, "go for yourself... to that Land that I will show you" (12:1). Some individuals in perpetual travelling mode stride along the way to nowhere. They stop, they are barely noticed if at all, and are completely forgotten as they move on. They are like the rolling stone that gathers no moss. On the way from nowhere to nowhere. Not, G-d reassured, with Avraham Avinu. G-d did not tell him just LECH - go, but LECH L'CHA, go for yourself. The L'CHA, Rashi explains, is for your benefit. Not only will your journey eventually bring you a family of your own, but it will blaze a trail of good, bring wonderfully influential interactions with those you meet, and set new standards for humanity. As Rashi puts it: 'so that I will make your nature known throughout the world'.

Indeed, though the 10 trials of Avraham Avinu (Avot 5:4) placed exceptional strain on him, what stands out for generations is that he is a father of chesed and derech eretz, civilized and decent behaviour, the key foundation for Matan Torah. We see him striving to work together with his nephew Lot and make an

amicable separation when that arrangement could not continue. We see him fighting against the imperial powers penetrating the region to rescue Lot. He took responsibility for him and did not turn his back on him. Later on, we see him offering hospitality to strangers under very difficult conditions (Rashi to 18:1), seeking some merit in which the people of S'dom might have last-minute reprieve from total destruction, and then accepting that G-d knew better than he did when He told him to turn his son into an offering. And yet he set his boundaries. He defined which moral standards would and would not be tolerated in his household to the degree of eventually throwing his eldest son out even though it caused him great pain.

We, his descendants and his disciples, are here to continue his work. We are not asked to sacrifice our children. On the contrary, G-d gave the ultimate Avraham Avinu-level NISAYON to Avraham Avinu and to Avraham Avinu only. And even that NISAYON turned out to imply that He wants us to take care and cherish our children, in sharp contrast to those who see the sacrifice of their nearest and dearest as the ultimate level of devotion to their pagan practices.

Yet as Torah followers, we strive to follow the mitzvot through thick and thin in the understanding that these are what G-d wants from us. We

strive to learn Torah daily and daven three times a day even where there are other things that easily get in the way. We are constantly reminded to bear the needs of others in mind and assist them where we can without thought of personal gain. We have a stand to take against anti-Torah forces and 'settled-science, cancel-culture' ideologies, too many of which have been extending their craftily-veiled tentacles towards the kedusha of our communities.

Avraham Avinu started this process in earnest with chesed and derech erez. Through Moshe Rabbeinu that and a lot more became formalized as our Torah codes. Since then, we have been applying them within the changing environments through which we ourselves do our own proactive LECH L'CHA - our own journeys.

Life is a journey. We are not here to stand still, neither as individuals nor as communities. On our journeys we constantly face new situations and our challenge is growth through interacting with them in a suitable way and influencing those we come in contact to do likewise. That is the legacy of Avraham Avinu. That is why we are told to reflect that, like Avraham Avinu, 'the world is created for me' (Sanhedrin 37a). 