

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Lech Lecha
November 1, 2025 *** 10 Cheshvan, 5786

Lech Lecha in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3161/jewish/Lech-Lecha-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Lech Lecha," means "Go Forth" and it is found in Genesis 12:1.

G-d speaks to Abram, commanding him, "Go from your land, from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you." There, G-d says, he will be made into a great nation. Abram and his wife, Sarai, accompanied by his nephew Lot, journey to the land of Canaan, where Abram builds an altar and continues to spread the message of a one G-d.

A famine forces the first Jew to depart for Egypt, where beautiful Sarai is taken to Pharaoh's palace; Abram escapes death because they present themselves as brother and sister. A plague prevents the Egyptian king from touching her, and convinces him to return her to Abram and to compensate the brother-revealed-as-husband with gold, silver and cattle.

Back in the land of Canaan, Lot separates from Abram and settles in the evil city of Sodom, where he falls captive when the mighty armies of Chedorlaomer and his three allies conquer the five cities of the Sodom Valley. Abram sets out with a small band to rescue his nephew, defeats the four kings, and is blessed by Malki-Zedek the king of Salem (Jerusalem).

G-d seals the Covenant Between the Parts with Abram, in which the exile and persecution (galut) of the people of Israel is foretold, and the Holy Land is bequeathed to them as their eternal heritage.

Still childless ten years after their arrival in the Land, Sarai tells Abram to marry her maidservant Hagar. Hagar conceives, becomes insolent toward her mistress, and then flees when Sarai treats her harshly; an angel convinces her to return, and tells her that her son will father a populous nation. Ishmael is born in Abram's eighty-sixth year.

Thirteen years later, G-d changes Abram's name to Abraham ("father of multitudes"), and Sarai's to Sarah ("princess"), and promises that a son will be born to them; from this child, whom they should call Isaac ("will laugh"), will stem the great nation with which G-d will establish His special bond. Abraham is commanded to circumcise himself and his descendants as a "sign of the covenant between Me and you." Abraham immediately complies, circumcising himself and all the males of his household.

[Haftarah in a Nutshell: 40:27 – 41:16](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/579794/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/579794/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The haftarah for this week discusses Abraham's journey to the land of Canaan at G-d's behest, and touches upon Abraham's miraculous battle against the four kings, both of which are described in this week's Torah reading.

The prophet Isaiah addresses Israel's complaint: ""My way [of serving G-d] has been ignored by the Lord, and from my G-d,

my judgment passes [unrewarded]."

Isaiah reminds Israel of the Creator's greatness. The time will come when "He will give the tired strength, and to him who has no strength, He will increase strength. Youths shall become tired and weary, and young men shall stumble, but those who put their hope in the Lord shall renew [their] vigor, they shall raise wings as eagles; they shall run and not weary, they shall walk and not tire." Nevertheless, "there is no comprehension of His wisdom," and as such, at times we cannot understand why He chooses to delay the reward of the righteous.

The haftorah then turns its attention to the idolatrous nations of the world. Isaiah reminds them of Abraham's greatness, how after arriving in Canaan he pursued and defeated four mighty kings. "The islands saw and feared; the ends of the earth quaked." Nevertheless, the nations who witness these miracles did not abandon their ways. "The [idol] craftsman strengthened the smith, the one who smoothes [the idol] with the hammer strengthened the one who wields the sledge hammer; the one who glues its coating says, 'It is good,' and he strengthened it with nails that it should not move..."

G-d promises the Jewish nation to reward them for their loyalty to G-d. "Do not fear for I am with you; be not discouraged for I am your G-d. . . Behold all those incensed against you shall be ashamed and confounded; those who quarreled with you shall be as naught and be lost."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Our Children Walk on Ahead by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l 5770

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/lech-lecha/our-children-walk-on-ahead/>

The call to Abraham, with which Lech Lecha begins, seems to come from nowhere:

“Go - from your land, your birthplace, and your father’s house, to the land which I will show you.” Gen. 12:1

Nothing has prepared us for this radical departure. We have not had a description of Abraham as we had in the case of Noah (“Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God”). Nor have we been given a series of glimpses into his childhood, as in the case of Moses. It is as if Abraham’s call is a sudden break with all that went before. There seems to be no prelude, no context, no background.

Added to this is a curious verse in the last speech delivered by Moses’ successor Joshua:

And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the river (Euphrates), Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nachor; and they served other gods. Joshua 24:2

The implication seems to be that Abraham’s father was an idolater. Hence the famous midrashic tradition that as a child, Abraham broke his father’s idols. When Terah asked him who had done the damage, he replied, “The largest of the idols took a stick and broke the rest”.

“Why are you deceiving me?” Terah asked, “Do idols

have understanding?”

“Let your ears hear what your mouth is saying,” replied the child. Bereishit Rabbah 38:8

On this reading, Abraham was an iconoclast, a breaker of images, one who rebelled against his father’s faith.

Maimonides, the philosopher, put it somewhat differently. Originally, human beings believed in one God. Later, they began to offer sacrifices to the sun, the planets and stars, and other forces of nature, as creations or servants of the one God. Later still, they worshipped them as entities – gods – in their own right. It took Abraham, using logic alone, to realise the incoherence of polytheism:

After he was weaned, while still an infant, his mind began to reflect. Day and night, he thought and wondered, how is it possible that this celestial sphere should be continuously guiding the world, without something to guide it and cause it to revolve? For it cannot move of its own accord. He had no teacher or mentor, because he was immersed in Ur of the Chaldees among foolish idolaters. His father and mother and the entire population worshipped idols, and he worshipped with them. He continued to speculate and reflect until he achieved the way of truth, understanding what was right through his own efforts. It was then that he knew that there is one God who guides the heavenly bodies, who created everything, and besides whom there is no other god.

Maimonides, Laws of Idolatry 1:2

What is common to Maimonides and the Midrash is discontinuity. Abraham represents a radical break with all that

went before.

Remarkably however, the previous chapter gives us a quite different perspective:

These are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot . . . Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran. Gen 11:27-32

The implication seems to be that far from breaking with his father, Abraham was continuing a journey Terah had already begun.

How are we to reconcile these two passages? The simplest way, taken by most commentators, is that they are not in chronological sequence. The call to Abraham (in Gen. 12) happened first. Abraham heard the Divine summons, and communicated it to his father. The family set out together, but Terah stopped halfway, in Haran. The passage recording Terah's death is placed before Abraham's call, though it happened later, to guard Abraham from the accusation that he failed to honour his father by leaving him in his old age (Rashi, Midrash).

Yet there is another obvious possibility. Abraham's spiritual insight did not come from nowhere. Terah had already made the first tentative move toward monotheism. Children complete what their parents begin.

Significantly, both the Bible and rabbinic tradition understood

divine parenthood in this way. They contrasted the description of Noah (“Noah walked with God”) and that of Abraham (“The God before whom I have walked”, Gen. 24:40). God Himself says to Abraham “Walk ahead of Me and be perfect” (Gen. 17:1). God signals the way, then challenges His children to walk on ahead.

In one of the most famous of all Talmudic passages, the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Metzia 59b) describes how the Sages outvoted Rabbi Eliezer despite the fact that his view was supported by a Heavenly Voice. It continues by describing an encounter between Rabbi Natan and the Prophet Elijah. Rabbi Natan asks the Prophet: What was God’s reaction to that moment, when the law was decided by majority vote rather than following that Heavenly Voice? Elijah replies, “He smiled and said, ‘My children have defeated Me! My children have defeated Me!’”

To be a parent in Judaism is to make space within which a child can grow. Astonishingly, this applies even when the parent is God (Avinu, “our Father”) Himself. In the words of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik:

“The Creator of the world diminished the image and stature of creation in order to leave something for man, the work of His hands, to do, in order to adorn man with the crown of creator and maker.” Halachic Man, p. 107

This idea finds expression in halachah, Jewish law. Despite the emphasis in the Torah on honouring and revering parents, Maimonides rules:

Although children are commanded to go to great lengths [in honouring parents], a father is forbidden to

impose too heavy a yoke on them, or to be too exacting with them in matters relating to his honour, lest he cause them to stumble. He should forgive them and close his eyes, for a father has the right to forgo the honour due to him. Hilchot Mamrim 6:8

The story of Abraham can be read in two ways, depending on how we reconcile the end of chapter 11 with the beginning of chapter 12. One reading emphasises discontinuity: Abraham broke with all that went before. The other, continuity: Terah, his father, had already begun to wrestle with idolatry. He had set out on the long walk to the land which would eventually become holy, but stopped halfway. Abraham completed the journey his father began.

Perhaps childhood itself has the same ambiguity. There are times, especially in adolescence, when we tell ourselves that we are breaking with our parents, charting a path that is completely new. Only in retrospect, many years later, do we realise how much we owe our parents – how, even at those moments when we felt most strongly that we were setting out on a journey uniquely our own, we were, in fact, living out the ideals and aspirations that we learned from them. And it began with God Himself, who left - and continues to leave - space for us, His children, to walk on ahead.

[Claiming Our Ancestors: The Case of Terah by Eliezer B. Diamond \(2014\)](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/claiming-our-ancestors-the-case-of-terah-2/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/claiming-our-ancestors-the-case-of-terah-2/>

For all of us, there is no going without leaving; and so it was for Abraham: “Go forth from your land, your birthplace, and the house of your father to the land that I shall show you” (Gen.

12:1) [emphasis added]. And when we leave places, we leave people as well. When Abraham departed for Canaan he left behind, among others, his father Terah. And it was always thus: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother” (2:24).

But the Rabbis do not let go of Terah so easily. Terah is, after all, a father, who deserves his son’s honor and reverence. And for our Sages, honor and reverence are not vague and ephemeral notions; they embody concrete obligations: “What is reverence and what is honor? Reverence: a son may not stand in the place where his father customarily stands nor sit in his father’s designated seat. He may not contradict his father or side with others against him. Honor: one is obligated to provide food, drink, clothing, shelter and transportation for one’s parents” (BT Kiddushin 31b). And if you think that these obligations can be fulfilled merely, or even mainly, by sending one’s parents a check to cover expenses you are wrong. Indeed, the Babylonian Talmud concludes that parents bear primary financial responsibility for providing for their own needs. The essence of honoring one’s parents is personal service. To put it in contemporary terms, I may not be obligated to pay for my parents’ groceries, but I am obligated to take them shopping. And this is true not only if they are incapable of shopping on their own. There are numerous stories in the Talmud of sages who honor their parents by bringing them water to drink. Perhaps in some of these cases this meant drawing water from a cistern, an arduous or at least inconvenient task. In others, however, the rabbi was performing a task that could have been done with ease by the parent—and that was the point. It is when we provide our parents with service and attention that are not essential from a utilitarian perspective that we honor them most.

The issue of Abraham's filial obligations to Terah arises in a midrashic discussion of a textual anomaly (Midrash Aggadah to Gen. 12:1). The Torah reports Terah's death (Gen. 11:32) before relating Abraham's departure from Haran (12:5), leaving us with the impression that this was the chronological order of events. However, the Torah records earlier that Terah fathered Abraham when he was 70 (11:26) and that he passed away at the ripe old age of 210 (11:32). Abraham left for Canaan when he was 75 (12:4). Thus, Terah lived for 65 more years after Abraham's departure.

As is often the case, this textual anomaly is explained by means of addressing yet another oddity. Terah is the last to be mentioned in a genealogical list that begins with Noah's son Shem. For each of those listed, we are given the age at which he fathered his son, the next link in the genealogical chain, and the number of years he lived after fathering him. The Torah does not provide a death notice for any of these figures except for Terah: "Terah died in Haran" (Gen. 11:32). Why is Terah the exception? The midrash explains, "This teaches you that the wicked are considered as dead even during their lifetimes"—a notion expressed frequently in rabbinic midrash and therefore neither original nor surprising. By this the midrash means to say that, although Terah lived on after Abraham's departure, the Torah considers him to have been already dead because he was spiritually moribund.

The midrash continues: "Abraham was afraid that he would be the cause of God's name being profaned; people would say that he abandoned his father in his old age and departed. God therefore reassured Abraham, saying, 'I exempt you from the obligation to honor your parents; moreover in the Torah I will record your father's death before your departure.'"

From the conclusion of the midrash we realize that, as is often the case, the midrash is bothered by the content of the text as well as by its form. It puts in Abraham's mouth a question that apparently bothered the Rabbis themselves: how could the pious Abraham abandon his father rather than being a dutiful son? The midrash addresses both the textual and religious difficulties as follows: Terah's death notice teaches us that he was wicked and therefore considered dead in his own lifetime. This notice precedes the story of Abraham to indicate that, because of Terah's wickedness, Abraham was not obligated to stay in Haran and attend to him. The achronological mention of Terah's death serves a second function as well. While the faithful might accept Terah's wickedness as justification for Abraham's actions, the doubters would see this explanation as a convenient excuse. Therefore, God denies them the opportunity to mock Abraham by concealing the fact that Terah was in fact alive when Abraham left Haran.

I assumed above that the problem of Abraham's inattention to Terah was raised because it was a source of genuine discomfort. However, it is also possible that the issue was raised merely because it offered a pretext both to provide an ingenious explanation of two textual anomalies, and to proclaim yet again that a life of sin is a life wasted. I would like to believe that the question was asked with some degree of sincerity. It must be admitted, however, that the initial rabbinic concern for Terah as a father is far outweighed by condemnation.

If indeed the midrash reflects a genuine concern for Terah's honor, perhaps it was inspired by a passage in Joshua's farewell speech, part of which was incorporated into the Haggadah: "In days past your forefathers—Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates

and worshipped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan” (Josh. 24:2–3). Verse 2 looks back at Abraham’s past, in which Terah appears as the father of both Abraham and Nahor. In verse 3, God plucks Abraham from both his geographical location and his religious and cultural environment, allowing Abraham to enter into a covenant with the One God, the God who will become Israel’s savior. For Abraham and his descendants, history begins anew; now only he, and not Terah, is “your father.”

And yet in verse 2 Terah is described not only as Abraham’s father, but as father of Abraham’s descendants as well—unlike the midrash, which ultimately strips Terah of his patriarchal status entirely. Verses 2 and 3 can be seen as a sort of palimpsest. This term refers to parchment or paper on which a text is written over a previous one that is still partially visible, if only faintly. The original text may no longer be legible. Nonetheless, its presence is felt, and we know that at one time these were the only words inscribed here.

Surely Joshua mentions Terah the idolater primarily as a foil in order to dramatize and emphasize the transformative consequences of God’s choosing Abraham. But the fact remains that Joshua does not ignore Terah or exclude him from Israel’s past. Abraham had a father and a home; without Terah there would have been no Abraham. We may have rejected Terah’s idolatrous ways, but we must not deny his paternity.

I imagine Terah seeing off his son. Did he understand and accept Abraham’s decision to heed a voice that only he heard? Was he thinking of the moments of joy that he had shared with his son? Was he angry, or perhaps deeply sad? I

do not know. But I also wonder whether in that moment Abraham turned to his father, embraced him and said, “Wherever I go, whatever I do, you will be with me. I follow a God that is not yours and go to a faraway land, but I will never forget your kindness and care. Know that in embracing another faith I still value what you have taught me through your words and actions. Know also that you will not be forgotten; I will tell my children and grandchildren that you are my father and therefore theirs as well.”

There is no going without leaving. But it is for us to choose what we take with us. (*Eliezer B. Diamond is the Rabbi Judah Nadich Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at JTS*)

[Lech Lecha: A Wide Open Tent by Rabbi Naomi Zaslow](https://truah.org/resources/naomi-zaslow-lech-lecha-moraltorah_2025/)
https://truah.org/resources/naomi-zaslow-lech-lecha-moraltorah_2025/

At a crossroad, a wide open tent stands. Its doorways, windows, and walls make little architectural sense. Surely, this whole tent, one with too many doors and not enough walls, should collapse! Whichever way we are heading, it seems as if the tent shifts and follows us. Sweet smells beckon from inside, and a voice seems to call out our names. This wide open tent, the home of Sarah and Abraham, becomes for this moment the very home that each of us needs at this point in our journey. Their home is each of our homes, our landing space, our comfort. In it, we feel welcome and at ease. In it, we see the spark of God in ourselves, our inherent value. We leave refreshed and renewed — not only for the radical hospitality, but because we have been seen and understood. We experience the awe of God within their tent, and we carry that connection onward with us, wherever we might go.

I've found myself daydreaming lately of Sarah and Abraham's cozy tent, especially as I've moved further along the process of adopting a waiting teen. "Waiting children" is a kind of technical term for children who have been in foster care and are unable to reunify with their parents. My partner and I are in the early stages of adopting a waiting teen, in the steps that involve a lot of paperwork and meetings with social workers, and waiting. The rabbinic interpretations of Sarah and Abraham's tent keep me patient(ish) and grounded(ish) as we navigate adoption.

I keep thinking in particular of the mishnah in Avot 1:5, which teaches: "[May your home be open wide.](#)" Rabenu Yonah later expounded: This means that our house should be like the house of Sarah and Abraham. Their house was on the road in a tight spot so that passers by could come in; and it was open on four sides, so that from all sides they could find an open door.

The metaphor here is about more than welcoming strangers to our homes. We are asked to both make a safe landing space for others, and also to trust that the mishnah is not only referring to inviting people into our homes. For if the tent, our home, is truly open on all sides, then it is also a safe space for people to leave. If the tent is open on all sides, there is an understanding that each person is continuing onward on a different journey. If the tent is open on all sides, our Torah is blessing us to be just as supportive in saying goodbye as we are in saying hello. There are over 100,000 waiting children in the United States, with the majority being between the ages of 13-17 years old. When the mishnah invites us to make our homes wide open, it is both encouraging us to embrace these children and to help them launch into the next step of their journey.

When I first started thinking about adopting a waiting child, I had to explore my own insecurities. Would I feel okay with “only” parenting a teen for a few years, until they were “adults” at 18? Others asked me if I would feel like I missed out on many “firsts” by not adopting a baby instead. These thoughts are common both in adopting waiting children and in parenting children in foster care. For both, the wide open tent gives us a spiritual model to emulate. Sarah does not turn away travelers who are “only” staying a few nights. Abraham does not bemoan the “firsts” that occurred before a traveler’s arrival: The focus is on the renewal that occurs in the tent, in the here and now. For Sarah and Abraham, at least within the realm of rabbinic legend, the emotional connection continues to hold when the guests leave — those doors are wide open, in all directions.

For most of my life, I’ve focused the narrative of Lech Lecha on Abraham’s biological descendants. But this year, I daydream about Abraham’s tent. I daydream about the 400,000 children in the United States foster care system, and the 100,000 waiting children. I imagine my wide open tent: ready to accept children and teens as they are, to celebrate them, to bless them, and to be blessed by them, as they travel on this journey of life. *(Rabbi Naomi Zaslow is a hospital chaplain in Baltimore, MD.)*

[Lech Lecha: What Can a Seemingly Extra Word Teach Us?](#)

[By Rabbi Rina Krautwirth](#)

<https://www.yeshivatmaharat.org/post/parshat-lech-lecha-what-can-a-seemingly-extra-word-teach-us>

In this week’s parsha, we encounter the origin story of the Jewish people. In a powerful display of faith, Abraham leaves his homeland and sets out for the Land of Israel, in response

to the word of God. The story of the Jewish people begins with God's commandment to Abram (later renamed Abraham): "And God said to Abram go for yourself from your homeland and from your birthplace and from the house of your fathers to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). A significant detail in this phrasing catches the attention of Rashi and Ramban. In God's commandment to Abram, after the word lech, go, seemingly an extra word appears: lecha, for yourself. Through the lens of these commentaries, one small and potentially extra word speaks to the greater destiny of the Jewish people.

Biblical scholar James Kugel has coined the term "omnificance" to describe the Rabbinic methodology of ascribing significance to any seemingly extraneous words in the Torah. In the Talmud, some opinions ascribe meaning to every word, such as to the grammatical particle "et" or the second word of parallel phrases. In contrast, Rabbi Yishmael maintains that in some cases, "dibra Torah kilashon b'nei adam," that the Torah speaks in the language of humankind, and that there is no need to ascribe meaning to each extra word. Rashi, following the first approach, explores the meaning of "lecha." Regarding the phrase "lech lecha," Rashi reads the extra word lecha as "for your own benefit, for your own good." Rashi refers to two midrashim that support this reading:

"There I will make of you a great nation while here you will not merit the privilege of having children (Rosh Hashanah 16b). Furthermore, I shall make known your character throughout the world (Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 3)."

From this extra word, Rashi, based on midrashim, learns that by heeding God's commandment, Abraham would be doing so

for his own benefit, in that he would become a nation and have a well-established name throughout the world.

In his programmatic statement embedded in his commentary on Genesis 3:8, Rashi explains that he will only quote midrashim that are “meyashevet lamikra,” in support of the text. Biblical scholar Sarah Kamin explains this statement to mean that Rashi only includes midrashim that fit with the context and linguistic features of the text. As per this statement, here Rashi maintains that the midrash’s interpretation of God’s statement fits with the Biblical text.

Ramban points out that, at first glance, the midrashic interpretation of lecha might seem unnecessary. Echoing the idea that “the Torah speaks like the language of humankind,” Ramban writes, “ki mishpat halashon ken,” that such are the rules of language. Tanakh in fact includes many examples of extraneous uses of the words “for yourself” or “for themselves,” he writes. For example, a verse in Shir Hashirim (2:11) states, “the rain is over and gone to itself.” Regarding the construction of the Tabernacle (Mishkan), sometimes God’s instructions to Moshe to create items in the Tabernacle include the term “for yourself,” and sometimes they do not. Ramban explains that the midrash needs to explain the extra uses of “yourself” in these verses, “she’ein hamelacha shelo,” because the work was not for Moshe himself.

In a way, here too, the work is not for Abraham. Abraham leaving his homeland for the Land of Israel hypothetically might have been a self-sacrificing act. Settling in Israel would serve to fulfill a divine imperative to create a Jewish nation and would benefit his descendants. However, for Abraham himself, this experience actually could have proven extremely grueling—the difficulty of leaving his homeland, his birthplace,

and the land of his ancestors (as the second part of Genesis 12:1 emphasizes) to travel a far distance to a strange land, and to have to start all over in a new land. The Midrash teaches that God reassured Abraham that this act would benefit Abraham personally as well.

Crucially, Abraham's descendants, the future Jewish people, would benefit from this journey as well. From then on, they would have their own homeland, their own birthplace, the land of their ancestors, a land to call their own, where they could carry out their own religious practices. Thousands of years later, the Land of Israel still has this same meaning to the Jewish people. The word lecha reminds us of the great and difficult sacrifice undertaken by Abraham to provide a future land to the Jewish people. *(Rabbi Rina Krautwirth attended Barnard College, where she majored in Biology. She is a graduate of the Maharat Kollel and Drisha Scholar's Circle. She also holds a Master's degree in Modern Jewish History from YU and an MLIS from Queens College.)*

Yahrtzeits

*Rabbi Lisa Vernon remembers her father Dr. Chester M. Vernon on Sun. Nov. 2

*Blossom Primer remembers her father Jack Rappaport on Mon. Nov. 3

*Shari Mevorah remembers her grandfather Morris Jablonek on Wed. Nov. 5

*Lisa Small remembers her father Joseph Small on Wed. Nov.