



Torah Reflections on Parashat Leh Leha

Genesis 12:1 – 17:27

8 Heshvan 5778

October 28, 2017

Some years ago, the peace advocate Thich Nhat Hanh organized a silent peace walk as a gift to the people of Los Angeles. He offered the participants the following suggestion: “Walk as if you kiss the earth with your feet, really tenderly, with all your love. If you know how to touch the present moment, you will touch the ultimate, you will touch God.”

These words seem to capture the experience of our ancestor, Abraham, who is called to make a personal journey of discovery to find his own relationship with God. We meet a man who yearns for an intimate relationship with the one, true God, the God of the spirit who will connect with his inner being. God tells Abram, who is later called Abraham, “*Leh leha* – go forth” to a land that will be shown to him, the promised land of Israel (Genesis 12:1).

Abram had the spiritual courage to take up the call and strike out for a foreign land filled with unexpected challenges. Throughout his journey, Abraham struggles with his decision to leave his homeland. God tries to reassure him and pacify his legitimate concerns for his survival, appearing to Abram in a vision saying, “Fear not, Abram, I am a shield to you...” (Genesis 15:1).

Although Abram finds much needed reassurance, he reminds God that he and Sarai, later renamed Sarah, remain childless. Abram is sharing with God the ultimate question – what is the meaning of my life? What possible future is there for the way of life I hold precious without offspring? What will happen to my dreams if I have no family to pass them on to?

What does God do to assuage Abram’s concern over a dream whose fulfillment now seems impossible to the dreamer? God takes Abram outside and says, “*Habet na hashamayma* – Gaze, now, toward the heavens” (Genesis 15:1). Don’t look back with regret to what might have been. You had no life back in Haran; your future is in your dream for a better life for you and your family. Yes, there is hardship, but look at the heavens and remember that original inspiration which gave you strength for the struggle. You knew it was right when you started your journey. Gaze now at the heavens, look into your heart, and you will find the capacity to reignite the spark that fires your passion for the godly life you seek to establish on this new soil.

When doubt plagues us, when our dreams are in jeopardy, sometimes we need to pause, gaze towards the heavens and renew our commitment to the worthy goals we have set for ourselves. If we each find ways to savor any moment of our life’s journey, we, too, can “touch God.” May the Holy One of Blessing continue to shield and protect each of us during our comings and our goings when we feel the most vulnerable.

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This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Aliza Berk, a licensed marriage and family therapist and spiritual director in private practice in San Diego. The Torah Reflections series is published by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties. More information and healing-oriented resources can be found at www.JewishHealingCenter.org.

