

Torah Table Talk
Abraham's Blessing and Ours
Parshat Lech Lecha
Genesis, Chapter 12:1 – 17:27



Jewish History begins with a journey. God calls Abram to leave his father's house and his birth place and his homeland for a distant country. Childless, Abram and his wife, Sarai, take their nephew Lot and the souls they "have acquired" in Haran and follow the call of God with nothing more than a promise. The truth is we know very little about our first ancestors. No where in the Book of Genesis is there a clear statement of his beliefs and ideas. Abram's character is defined through his actions: his willingness to trust God, his hospitality and his desire to protect his nephew Lot. We see him as a father, a husband, a tribal leader. He is hardly without faults. But we are left with a picture of Abraham that is characterized by *Hesed*, by kindness and caring for others. This is part of his legacy to the Jewish people.

Genesis 12:2-3

I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you; all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.

Rashi: 12:2

I will make you a great nation: (*Rashi wonders why there are three blessings in this verse: I will make you a great nation, I will bless you and I will make your name great*) Travel causes three things: It diminishes the ability to have children, it diminishes wealth and it causes him to lose his status and fame. Therefore he was dependent on these three blessings, for God promised Abraham children, wealth and fame. **And you will be a blessing:** The blessings are placed in your hand. Until now they were in my hand. I blessed Adam and Noah, but henceforth you will bless whomsoever you desire.

1. Look at the verse in Genesis. How many blessings does God promise Abraham? What are they? Do you think Rashi, 'gets it right when he suggests what the blessings are? Why or why not?
2. According to Rashi why does God promise Abraham three different blessings? What are they and what is their connection to Abraham's journey?
3. Given the difficulties we have faced throughout our long history, how is Judaism a blessing to us? Do you think God's Promise only applied to Abraham or does it apply to future generations of his descendants?
4. How are we to be a blessing to the other nations?

Otzar Hayim (A Hasidic Collection of Divrei Torah)

Even though I have already promised you greatness, blessings and much goodness, you must now rise up and "Be a blessing" throughout the land. With the best of your strength, you must bring the blessings that I have given you to others, for the arousing of the lower world (through good deeds) brings an arousing of the upper worlds; Good deeds and Mitzvot are a conduit through which the blessings of heaven are drawn down upon you.

- 1 How does the author of this statement understand the final phrase of our verse: “You shall be a blessing?”
- 2 What is the connection between our actions and the blessings of God?

Rashi 12:2

Another interpretation: **I will make you a great nation:** that is why we say (in our daily prayers: “The God of Abraham;” **And I will bless you:** This is why we say (in our daily prayers, “The God of Isaac;” **And I will make your name great:** This is why you might say “The God of Jacob.” You might think (the prayer) should conclude, with all three of them; therefore the text states, **And you shall be a blessing:** with your name will the prayer be concluded and not with their names. (We conclude the Amida “Magen Avraham”)

1. What is the connection between the Amida and God’s promise to Abraham?
2. Why does the Amida conclude with a second mention of Abraham and not the other forefathers? Besides being the founding father of the Jewish people what is so special about Abraham’s role in Jewish history; how is it different from the other Patriarchs?

Midrash Rabbah

When the Holy One said to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred" (Gen. 12:1), what did Abraham resemble? A vial of scent with a tight-fitting lid put away in a corner so that its fragrance could not go forth. As soon as it was moved from that place [and opened], its fragrance began to go forth. So the Holy One said to Abraham: Abraham, many good deeds are in you. Travel about from place to place, and the greatness of your name will go forth in My world. "Get thee out . . . and I will make you a great nation."

1. How does Abraham’s journey help him to become a blessing to the people around him? Do you think that the presence of the Jews in the diaspora has been a blessing to the other nations of the world? In what way?

How to use Torah Table Talk

1. *Read the sheet out loud to one another. Discuss what it has to say.*
2. *Focus on the text in the box. It is taken from Biblical, post-biblical and modern Jewish sources. What does it mean? How does it make you feel?*
3. *Try to answer the questions following the text.*
4. *This is not a test and there are many correct answers and interpretations to each question. Share your ideas with one another. Be open and honest in sharing your ideas.*

***“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”***

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