

G-d says to Avraham avinu:

לֶךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְמוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ

Lech L'cha: Lamed Chaf, Lamed Chaf. English translation: Go forth, Go for yourself, Go to yourself, Get you gone, Schlep yourself, get off your tuchus, or, my favorite, Get out of your comfort zone.

Avraham Avinu was the first to hear this call. The Gerer rebbe says that what was special about Abraham was not that G-d spoke to him. G-d speaks to everyone. It was that Abraham heard. He understood that G-d was there in that demand to go forth.

Avraham understood that G-d was there in that demand to go forth and that G-d is a presence which transforms the nature of the journey. The journey becomes the quest between the human and the other, between the transient and the transcendent, the talking and the listening between them, the arguments, the long silences, and the singing on the way.

Although the words are read as lech lecha, the going and the self that we become may also be pronounced as the same. Hence what we are is our life's journey and to become ourselves we have to go. Maybe that is why, according to one interpretation, the country to which G-d promises to lead Abraham is not 'the land which I will show *you*', but 'the land where I will show you *you*'.

The archetypal Jewish journey is not a travelogue; it is the discovery of that 'you', 'you' the inner self, 'you' the other, 'You' G-d, towards whom all life travels. It is a ceaseless process; there is no homecoming - only another setting out. For as the 'you' that I discern changes the person I become, so the 'I' who sets out is no longer the same traveler going forth. I am constantly in my journey, my new departure, lech lecha till the end. Thus there is no final answer to the question 'Who am I?', only the process of discovery, the constant becoming, until death and even beyond.

The Torah itself ends en route, not with an arrival but with an unfinished journey. Go up the mountain, says G-d to Moses, and look at the land I promised you; see it from afar and resign yourself to the fact that you're never going to get there. How then is Moses' life vindicated?

NYU Philosophy Philosopher Samuel Scheffler, author of the new book, Death and the Afterlife says,

Because we take it for granted that other people will live on after we ourselves have died, we don't normally reflect much about the significance that that assumption has for us, and if we call it into question — if we thought that human beings were not going to live on earth for very long after our own deaths, ... that would have quite profound effects on how we live the rest of our lives, that many of the things we now regard as worth doing would no longer seem to us worth doing. And in that sense, it seems as if the assumption that others will live on is more important to us than the belief that we will survive our own deaths.

Moses' legacy, Torah tziva lanu Moshe, causes Avraham Avinu's and all our ancestors' life's journeys to live on in us.

Lech L'cha, get out of your comfort zone, listen to G-d calling out and go into 'the land where G-d will show you you'.

Thanks to Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg of the New North London Synagogue who presented many of these ideas at Limmud UK in 2005. Shabbat Shalom.