THE JOURNEY OF LIFE
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The late and prolific American Author James Michener published his second novel "The Fires of Spring" in 1949, shortly after the close of WWII. I read it in High School and while I can't remember who thrust the paperback in to my hand, I do recall they said to me at the time, "read this, it's the story of your life if you dare to have one."

A bit of an odd and forceful charge I recall thinking then as a teenager. How can a book be the story of my life if I haven't lived so much of my life yet? And what did they mean by, 'if I DARE to have one?"

Michener's "The Fires of Spring", which many critics think was semi-autobiographical, is the story of David Harper an orphan, seemingly

doomed to loneliness and poverty. As a teen David was a petty thief and promiscuous – more out of boredom than anything else. Later in life he discovers that his longing to embrace the world is stronger than the harsh realities that constrain him. And in a moment reminiscent of this week's Torah Portion *Lech Lecha* David breaks out of his life to find himself.

The novel, set in the period just after the Second World War, a seminal moment for the generation that had fought the war and the children that were often raised with working mothers and fathers overseas, many which did not return or did not return whole.

Boys returned home from the battlefield as men, women who had entered the work force did not

want to leave only to return to the kitchen and housework and teens found freedom in rebellion, not unlike our forefather Abraham who rejected his father's business as an idol maker to follow a voice inside himself that challenged him, "you can be more than this."

Transportation technology among many new innovations that were products of the war made travel and escape from the confines of your place of birth just a gas tank away. Where before generations of North Americans lived in the same towns and villages for lifetimes – this generation was leaving home, spreading out, it was a *lech lecha* generation, a generation on the move.

The question of the era was where are you going? It wasn't a question of geography but rather of

psychology. With so much possibility and freedom – how would you embrace it for yourself? What was your purpose in life and how would you pursue it? In our parsha the Torah frames it as, *Lech Lecha*, which commentators have translated as go into yourself, find yourself, your purpose.

It was in this context that Michener wrote the following observation about David's quest for meaning, and a passage that even at 16/17 years of age I clipped and filed away thinking it was torah for my life. Given that it was written in the mid-1940s I've gender neutralized it from **he** to **they** to make it accessible to all.

"For this is the journey that humans make: to find themselves. If they fail in this, it doesn't matter much else they find. But if a person happens to find

oneself- if they know what they can be depended upon to do, the limits of courage, the positions from which they will no longer retreat, the degree to which they can surrender their inner life to someone, the secret reservoirs of their determination, the extent of their dedication, the depth of their feelings for beauty, their honest and un-postured goals-then they have found a mansion which they can inhabit with dignity all the days of their life" (James Michener, 'The Fires of Spring")

In this week's parasha we read a similar imperative to find purpose in life, to listen too and live as - your true self. The command to Avram, *Lech Lecha* comes from the voice of God – a voice Avram like many of us hears in his conscience - not on a mountain top or from a ray of light descending from the heavens, but echoing in the

corners of our mind, heard loudest when we stop to listen to them, but always there as background music challenging us, 'is this who you are meant to be, is this what you are called to do? Is this the purpose for which you were created?'

1. And the Lord had said to Abram, Go, [find yourself] Get out from your country, and from your family, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you;
2. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing;
3. And I will bless those who bless you, and curse him who curses you; and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.
4. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him; and Abram was

seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

A footnote – though the Torah gives Avram's age as 75 at the time he left his father's house, age in the Torah is a literary device. Later the Torah records that Abraham was 175 years old when he died. Thus, most commentators place Abraham's relative age as a late teenager or in his early 20s. The traditional period of self-discovery.

This fact is emphasized by the change in Avram's name to Abraham shortly after he sets out on his journey and makes a covenant with God. Both Avram and his wife Sarai have the letter *Hey* added to their names becoming Avraham and Sarah. The *hey* is connected to the name of God. As I have taught before G.O.D. means something

different to perhaps everyone in this room. And for many of us who struggle with the idea of an omnipotent intervening, miracle making, G-O-D can be an acronym, for the source of Good Orderly Direction.

The *Hey* is added to Avram and Sarai's names when they accept life direction and purpose from God as they understand that heavenly voice to be. Without a sense of purpose their names and therefore their lives are incomplete.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch observed about this passage that, every individual is directly responsible to God for his/her personal conduct. If it becomes necessary, if the values practiced by the majority are not ones that the individual

believes are proper, then the individual must go alone, his own way, with God."

How could we have survived today as a people had we not received from Avram the courage to free ourselves from self-imposed slavery of self-limited expectations, and harnessed dreams? Avram couldn't be Abraham living in his father's house, his familiar surroundings, the life that had been chosen for him.

In finding himself, Abraham found what we are all looking for, a purpose, a reason to get up in the morning that is internally motivated.

Clayton Christenson, a professor at the Harvard School of Business, in his book, "How Will You Measure Your Life?" offers a model of how to

make that, “should I stay or should I go” decision that confronted both Abram and Michener’s David, and all of us by applying business theory to this eternal dilemma.

Christenson explains that IN LIFE, like in business we each have limited resources: time, energy, talent and wealth. With every moment of our time, every decision about how we spend our energy, our talent and our money, we are making a statement about what really matters to us.

You can talk all you want about having a clear purpose in your life, but ultimately this means nothing if you are not investing the resources you have in a way that is consistent with your purpose. If the decisions you make about where to invest your blood, sweat and tears are not consistent

with the person you aspire to be, you'll never become that person.

Abraham's journey and our quest to know ourselves are one and the same. In truth it's not a journey we take only in our formative years as teens or young professionals; it's a journey we take time and time again. We are on that journey right now, all of us.

To leave your father's house physically and metaphorically and to go find your purpose in life is to truly live a life of meaning. Sometimes – like with Abraham and David that means we have to jettison all connections to our past and chart a new course. But other times, our journey of self-discover is a return to home, to the source of who we are but may have moved away from over time.

To both – Torah is our guide and our road map to a life of meaning and purpose, our Good-Orderly-Direction. May it be our life, may it lengthen our days.