LECH LECHA – A JOURNEY TO FIND YOURSELF
RABBI DAN MOSKOVITZ

"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"[1]

The late and prolific American Author James Michener published his second novel "The Fires of Spring" in 1949, shortly after the close of WWII, writing we can surmise to a generation of boys, now men home from war, and women freed from the suffrage of housework having experience the liberation (at least for its day) of being in the work force. He wrote of the voice inside each of them, and each of us that if we listen suggests in seminal moments in our life, "you can be more than this."

In this week's parasha we read a similar imperative to find purpose in life, to listen to 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. The Eternal One said to Abram, Go, forth (find yourself) from your land, your birthplace, your father's house, to the land I will show you.
2. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and it shall be a blessing.[2]

A footnote – though the Torah gives Avram's age as 75 at the time he left his father's house[3], age in the Torah is a literary device. Later the Torah records that Abraham was 175 years old when he died. Thus, one could reasonably 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.

---

[1] James Michener, 'The Fires of Spring" New York 1949, Random House p. 488
[2] Genesis 12:1-2
[3] Genesis 12:4

The word/name God means something different to each of us, like finger prints it has been my experience that though similar no two people's working definition of God are exactly alike. For many of us who struggle with the idea of an omnipotent intervening, miracle making, I learned years ago while working with those in addition recovery that G-O-D can be an acronym, for the source of Good Orderly Direction. GOD is a lodestar, a compass point toward which we, like the biblical Avram can direct our lives.

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, 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."[4]

[4] How Will You Measure Your Life, Clayton M Christensen, James Allworth, Karen Dillon Harper Business (May 15, 2012)

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 Michener 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.