



# Carnegie Shul Chatter

## October 29, 2020



## Parsha Insights

This week's Torah portion, Lech Lecha has a lot of things that one could write or comment about. God tells Abram and Sarai to go from Abram's father's house to a land that God will show him, where God will make for Abram a great nation. A famine forces Abram to travel to Egypt, and Sarai is taken to the palace of Pharaoh (Jews in Egypt with Pharaoh, that's never a good thing); Abram's nephew, Lot, settles in Sodom (that also is not such a good thing); Abram marries Hagar, and Ishmael is born (more trouble lies ahead); and Abram, at the ripe old age of 90 gets circumcised (ouch). But instead I am including three articles from *aish.com* that I think are excellent commentaries on the parsha, and one of them is even written by Rabbi Avraham Twerski, who was the founder of Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pittsburgh. He was also an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Medicine.

## Transacting in Faith

As we learn from Rabbi Twerski, it was easy for Abram and Moses to have faith in God — he was right there talking to them.

But what about all of the Children of Israel who had trouble maintaining their faith after they left Egypt and while journeying to the Promised Land? How could these people, for whom God opened the Red Sea, lose their faith? That really amazes me.

But equally amazing is that so many Jews who were confined in the concentration camps of the Nazis maintained their faith despite the most deplorable conditions imaginable.

We are living in some pretty dire times ourselves right now, with the pandemic's second wave sweeping around so much of our country and Europe. But just as those who went through the Holocaust kept their faith, so must we.

We may not have God chatting with us as up close and personal as Abraham and Moses did but, as Rabbi Twerski writes, "We have great works available to us to increase our faith and broaden our concept of God. If we fail to do so, we will have no answer when we are asked, 'Did you seek to improve the quality of your faith? Did you transact in faith?'"

# Maximizing Faith

By Rabbi Avraham Twerski

**And he trusted in God, and God reckoned (it to him as righteousness 15:6)**

The Torah tells us that God considered the patriarch Abraham's faith to be meritorious. But let us reflect a moment. If God spoke to any of us, would we not have an unshakeable faith? In what way is Abraham praiseworthy for believing in God with Whom he communicated directly?

This question is also asked about Moses. How could Moses fulfill the mitzvah of having faith in God when he was in direct contact with him? We do not have faith that there is a moon or that two plus two equals four. That which we see or understand does not require an act of faith.

The answer was given by Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitz, who cited the Talmud that at the end of a person's life when he stands before God, he will be asked, "Did you transact in faith?" (Shabbos 31a). This is usually understood as asking whether one transacted business honestly. Rabbi Mordechai said that it has an additional meaning. When a person transacts in business, he negotiates and tries in every way to maximize his profit. He does not settle for a meager gain. This is what one will be asked at the end of his life: "Did you transact in faith?" i.e., did you do everything possible to maximize your faith, or did you just accept whatever you were given?

Abraham and Moses transacted in faith. They, of course, knew there was a God. They did not have to have faith in His existence. But they tried to strengthen their faith by coming to an ever greater knowledge of God, and believing even that which they could not see about God.

Some people take their faith in God for granted. Of course they believe that there is a God. But they may not have gone beyond that to try to know more and more about God. We have great works available to us to increase our faith and broaden our concept of God. If we fail to do so, we will have no answer when we are asked, "Did you seek to improve the quality of your faith? Did you transact in faith?"

## Inner Truth

By Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt

This week's Torah portion introduces us to Abraham, the first Jew. Until now, the Torah's messages have been universal messages, relevant for all of mankind. But now the messages are more specific and unique to the Jewish people, beginning with God's first communication to Abraham.

The Torah is not a history book; it is our instruction manual for living. So if the Torah tells us that God communicated with Abraham, it means that God is sending a message to each and every one of us.





So what is God's first command to Abraham and in essence, God's first command to every Jew? God tells Abraham: "Go to you, from your land, your birthplace and your father's home to the land which I will show you" (Genesis 12:1).

At first glance, this is hard to understand. What does God mean by, "go to you"?

God is telling Abraham to leave behind the influences that have shaped his value system: his land - his society; his birthplace - his peer group; his father's home - his family.

God says to Abraham: Don't allow these influences to determine your beliefs in life. Don't allow yourself to be a simple product of your environment, rather: "Go to you." Go to yourself, Abraham. Look deep inside and find out who you are. And don't let anyone else tell you. Trust yourself, because ultimately that is all you have to trust.

Truth, God tells Abraham, is to be found within every one of us. But we are usually so busy seeking it from without, that we don't notice what is right in front of our eyes, within.

This is a shocking philosophy for a religion to give its adherents, let alone as its first command. Forget what your family tell you to be true. Forget what your friends say. Forget what society says is true. Look inside yourself, and trust what you know to be true.

Let me be clear: Judaism is not saying that everyone has his own truth - quite the opposite. It is saying that when human beings look inside themselves, they all find the same truth, for truth transcends individual minds and bodies.

Judaism can only say this if it is supremely confident that for a person who looks inside with honesty and a sense of calm, the truth he will find will be the same truth that Judaism teaches.

Now that's a religion I like!

# A Life Lesson

*By Adam Lieberman*

## **Moving With Purpose**

Ten generations had passed since the death of Noah. The world had once again begun to worship all sorts of idols and held complete contempt for any monotheist view – everyone except for one man named Abraham. After significant and thorough thought and investigation, he was certain that there was only one God and began teaching this radically different belief to anyone who would listen. When God saw just how committed Abraham was to spreading this message, God appeared before him and said..."Go for yourself from your land... to the land that I will show you... So Abraham went as God had spoken to him..." (Genesis, 12:1-4)

## A Life Lesson

According to surveys, moving ranks is one of the most stressful things a person ever does. A reason for this is that human beings are creatures of habit and don't like to move away from things that are familiar and comfortable.

God not only told Abraham to move, He didn't even tell Abraham where he would be going. Certainly seems like a doubly stressful situation.

But it wasn't.

Because when someone leaves the familiar and comfortable to go to something of a much higher and worthy cause, then the stress involved in the move is dramatically decreased. Because Abraham was leaving his home to spread the word of God, the stress involved was reduced to almost nothing.

Suppose a doctor decided to close up his practice, pack his bags, and move to a third world country in order to help the people in desperate need of his skills. The doctor's stress of leaving his familiar surroundings is now replaced with excitement and purpose. But if instead, the doctor was moving to a different city just because he wanted a larger house, then this move now becomes filled with anxiety and worry.

As creatures of habit we tend to shop in the same stores, have the same circle of friends, and eat the same types of foods. We will always enjoy the comfort of the familiar versus the anxiety of the unknown. But when the unknown is for a higher and greater purpose, then the anxiety is diluted in the sea of purpose.

When we're making a difference in the world, we're acting consistent with how God created us. So if we move away from something comfortable toward something unfamiliar - but the unfamiliar will better the world - then almost all stress is left behind. The reason the stresses of the unknown are no longer present is that the unknown is now known - your higher purpose is awaiting you.

