

Go and Be There

A rabbi of mine once said: ‘The World moves so fast, now in three minutes you can microwave a potato!’ We struggle with the need to find immediate gratification in our every pursuit. We don’t have the time to be patient. The Hebrew word for Patience is *Savlanut* – derived from the verb *svl* – to bear a burden or suffer. The virtue of patience becomes an affliction of suffering. Our new hero of the Bible, Abraham, embodies a counterpoint to the nowness-ness of our lives. His story begins in earnest in this week’s Torah portion, Lech Lecha, with him and his family embarking on a new, life-journey. The World at that time, Maimonides suggests, had completely forgotten about G-d; monotheism was dead and gone. Abraham was a rare soul. He intuited and envisioned a quality in the World that others could not see or realize. (See Laws of Idolatry 1:1-3)

As the readers of the Bible, the text lacks the back-story. At seventy-five years old, Abraham has gone through a life of self-introspection and inquiry. But now, in the twelfth chapter of Genesis, we see the flowering of a life of searching: ‘And G-d spoke with Abram.’

And what is the basic message that G-d has for Abraham? “Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.” (Genesis 12:1) Essentially, G-d chases Abraham from all his familiarities; his life and Sarah’s life – routine and all – is crumpled and tossed away.

But what does Abraham give up everything for? For ‘a land that I will show you.’ (ibid) Abraham is chasing the unknown, a dream and a hope. We can only imagine the power of self-surety that must surge through Abraham. To make this journey to nowhere, Abraham’s first step must be listening to his heart.

In this act of moving, the willingness to ‘Go,’ Abraham becomes the father of Judaism and a hero who speaks to us even still unto this day. At times, we must turn fully inward, listen powerfully patiently and be ready to start a new journey. And though the end goal is often not fully revealed to us, we still move toward a future that we pray is brighter and more peaceful.

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach,
Rav Menashe East