

Lech Lecha By Chazan Jaclyn Chernett

God told Abram to leave his country, his birthplace and father's house and go to a land which God would show him and then:

ב. וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל, וְאֶבְרַכְךָ, וְאֶגְדַּלְתִּיךָ שְׁמִי; וְהָיָה בְרָכָה

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing.

ג. וְאֶבְרַכְתֶּם מִבְּרַכְיָי וּמִקְלָלָי אֶאֱרֹךְ וּבְרַכְיוֹ בְּרַךְ כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

If repeating a word five times in the course of two short sentences isn't message enough, what is! The 75-year-old patriarch listened, acted on his instruction and received a firm, repeated message. God will bless Abram. Abram will be a blessing. God will bless those that bless him (and his people) and in him shall the whole of humanity be blessed. First God will bless – after all, blessings are only received from God. That is the verb. But to be a blessing – that is the state of being, the quality bestowed on us once we have been blessed by God.

The whole of our liturgy is based on blessings – on the formula that we recite a hundred times a day: 'Blessed are YOU, God'. What a chutzpah! Who are we mere mortals to bless God? As if God needs our blessing! Who are we to issue a blessing to God when God is the source of all blessing? Rabbi Reuven Hammer (Entering Jewish Prayer, 1994) says "The uniqueness of a blessing is that it is pure praise, asking nothing of God but rather giving us an opportunity to remind ourselves of God's presence and of the ways in which we experience Him in the world." So when we utter a blessing we acknowledge God's infinite and wondrous gifts to the world.

How, then, was Abram - and presumably, his progeny - to be a blessing? This is the ikkar – the point. The Jew (and every human being who acknowledges the message of God to Abram) is to live a life of constant acknowledgement of God and, b'tselem Elohim, in the likeness of God, to be a source of blessing to the world.

In 1943 The French writer Edmond Fleg wrote a little book called "Why I am a Jew". He dedicated it to his yet unborn grandson (was that a bit hopeful – ah well, a girl might have sufficed too...). He concluded with this:

"... Abraham left his Chaldean home to follow the call of his invisible God. And I say to myself: from this remote father right up to my own father, all these fathers have handed on to me a truth which flowed in their blood, which flows in mine; and shall I not hand it on, with my blood, to those of my blood? ... But, whether you abandon it or whether you follow it, Israel will journey on to the end of days."

And as each of us journeys on through our lives, let us all be mindful of this legacy so we might strive to be a blessing to the world.

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