

ABRAHAM, SARAH AND WHAT'S LOST ON THE JOURNEY -

LECH L'CHA 5775

Transition moments breed reflection on our lives. They send us back almost to birth and propel us then, often haphazardly and unpredictably, through the IPhoto Event Library of our lives.

That's certainly where I am right now, just two weeks before my oldest child's bat mitzvah. Naturally, I'm especially obsessed with my IPhoto library of the past 12 years -- and all that we, and she, have experienced, since Adina first arrived on the scene one rainy, cold night in Wynnewood, PA.

For my family, the defining "tags" of these dozen years have been movement, from places familiar to places less familiar; the draw of Israel; the search for tight-knit Jewish community that reflects our value aspirations; the exploration of new professional vistas; and the willingness to take risks for all the above. And, of course, maintaining a solid, well-functioning family unit through it all.

We've been blessed with great strength, baruch Hashem, over the past 12 years, but, that being said, I can certainly attest that movement,

search, exploration and risk-taking can take their toll, if we are not vigilant about maintaining what is good and constant in our lives.

We need look no further than parashat Lech L'Cha to see the fortitude built through movement and transition, the critical role that faith in God and in ourselves play in these processes, and also the expense they can exact if we are not vigilant along the way.

God, who's now committed to partnering with human beings and understanding them, shows great empathy with Abraham in His famous charge to our patriarch. Abraham, *Lech L'cha*, go for yourself. "This will be good for you." Still, that being the case, I, God, recognize the sacrifices you will make in the process, leaving your *aretz*, your land, your *moledet*, your kindred, and *bait aveecha*, the familiar ways of home. You're leaving land, people, and a way of life. I promise you -- and have faith, Abraham -- that you will be reconstituted in all three. In a new land, with a people (a *goy gadol*) you generate, and with the way of life, ethical monotheism, that reflects your true self and that will be a blessing, *a beracha*, for all those around you.

Abraham famously makes the journey, along with the kernels of a people, *the nefashot*, who he has already brought into his revolutionary monotheistic clan. The midrash expands on Abraham's extraordinary

character and strength of belief in Charan, even before he is first called by God. God responds to Abraham's courageous leap of faith by appearing to Abraham in Canaan a number of times in this parasha, and reinforcing and expanding God's promises to Abraham. Abraham responds in thanksgiving by building altars to God. The relationship between God and Abraham is a strong one built on mutual faith, and becomes a pillar, along with Abraham's considerable inner strength, for Abraham's success in his new land.

Yet, as we see when Abraham goes to Egypt and later to Gerar, something critical is lost in the transition from Charan to Canaan -- something in the relationship between Abraham and Sarah. They are certainly partners in mission, welcoming angels together into their tent and such. But are they partners in love, partners in family? I would argue not. The Egypt and Gerar stories, their very different reactions to the promise of childbirth, Abraham's quick banishment of Hagar at Sarah's demand, and Sarah's absence in the story of the Akeda suggest that the strength of their trust, the constancy of their communication, is somehow compromised in that initial journey, the enterprise of relocating and resettling.

This week, in Egypt, to obtain food in a time of famine, Abraham spins a lie about Sarah, demonstrates uncharacteristic weakness, and exposes the weak underbelly of his relationship with Sarah. Abraham tries to pass Sarah off as his sister and tells her to lie about her identity, at the same time putting her at risk to be sexually violated by Pharaoh. How can he put Sarah at risk in such a way? Does survival demand such an awful compromise? Does Sarah really agree to this? An Abraham and Sarah, together on the same page, I would argue, could come up with another plan that avoids deception and damage to their relationship.

The Ramban argues that Abraham commits a great sin in this instance, all the more so in leaving Canaan and abandoning, at least momentarily, the faith that God will provide for him in Canaan. The Ramban also suggests that Sarah never agrees to Abraham's ruse, as it's Abraham, not Sarah, who actually tells the Egyptians that she is his sister.

Something happens on the way to Canaan, I believe, in the relationship between Abraham and Sarah. All the evidence demonstrates that, once in Canaan, they are never truly on the same page, except in their professional roles as missionaries of monotheism to the world.

The saga of Abraham and Sarah should not give us pause to make leaps in our lives, to have lives of movement and growth. But it should remind us that, as we leap, as we go through transitions, we can get so caught up in the leap that we forget to attend to what's already there, what we take with us wherever we go, and what grounds us ultimately. Our families, our family relationships, and our faith in God. These relationships always need our attention, wherever we are, wherever we go, and, in particular, en route.