

# LECH LECHA: THE DIFFICULTY OF “MOVIN’ ON”

## Genesis 12:1-3

- 1) The Eternal said to Avram, “Go forth from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house to the land that 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 you shall be a blessing.
- 3) I will bless those who bless you and curse one who curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.”

וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹוֹק אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ  
 וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָה:  
 וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמֹךָ וְהָיָה  
 בְּרָכָה:  
 וְאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֶאָר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל  
 מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה:

## Pirkei d-Rebbe Eliezar 26

Our father Abraham was tried with ten trials, and he withstood them all.

עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו, ועמד  
 בכולן.

*(In the first trial, the rulers and “magicians” of the land sought to kill Abraham. He was hidden underground for thirteen years. At the end of this time, he came out with knowledge of Hebrew and a deep connection to God. In the second trial, Abraham was imprisoned and, after ten years, was thrown unto a furnace. God saved Abraham from its flames because of his enduring faith.)*

The third trial was his *tiltul* from his father’s house and from the land of his birth... *Tiltul* is harder for a person than all [other beings or events]. Whence do we know of his *tiltul*? Because it is said, “Now the Eternal said to Avram, Go forth...” (Gen. 12:1).

הנס השלישי, טלטולו מבית אביו ומארץ  
 מולדתו... והטלטול קשה לאדם יותר מכל.  
 ומניין טלטולו? שנאמר „ויאמר ה' אל אברם לך  
 לך.”

**טלטול** -- migration, moving, exile (Jastrow dictionary) or violent shaking (modern Hebrew)

## Genesis: The Beginnings of Desire (Avivah Zornberg, pp. 85-86)

*Tiltul* is a kind of harassed, distracted, even confused movement. Is Abraham’s journey indeed a movement of *distraction*, in the full irony of its two senses: a drawing away, a truancy from the fruitful pursuits of life, and, ultimately, a madness? *Tiltul* is the word that is most vividly descriptive of exile; to be in exile is to be “off the point,” it is to be reduced to a handled passivity in which drives and compulsions dominate freely regulated motion. Like a ball, says the midrash (Va-yikra Rabbah 5:5), which is caught in the air, and can never touch ground. Or like a dove that never rests; folds one wing at a time and flies on, obedient to some instinct of the species.

*Tiltul* is the hardest experience of all, and it is this that is the measure of Abraham's passion (Bereshit Rabbah 39:2): " 'Your ointments yield a sweet fragrance, Your name is like finest oil' (Song of Songs 1:3). What did Abraham resemble? A flask of myrrh, surrounded by wadding placed in a corner, so that its fragrance could not escape. But when it was carried from place to place [*tiltul*], its fragrance wafted out".

The transformation of Abraham's being, which is signified in the change of his name (the "extension" of his name) can be achieved only through a readiness to submit himself to the "distractions" of placelessness. The perfume is released and diffused in the transforming discontinuities of the *lekh lekha* travail.

### ***Encyclopedia Judaica***

**TOLEDO**, city in Castile, central Spain; capital of Castile until 1561.

There is no substantive information available on the beginnings of the Jewish settlement in Toledo, which was only a small village in the period of Roman rule over Spain. According to a Jewish tradition dating from the period of Muslim rule, the Jewish settlement in Toledo was the most ancient in the Iberian peninsula. This tradition was accepted by Isaac Abrabanel who states (in his commentary to the Book of Kings, at the end, and to Obadiah 20) that the first settlers were exiles from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who had arrived there after the destruction of the First Temple, and were associated with a legend concerning Pirus and Hispan who took part in the siege of Jerusalem. Hence the name Tuletula (Lat. *Toletum* = Toledo) has been explained as deriving from their wanderings (Heb. *taltelah*) when they were expelled from their land.

### ***Becoming (Rabbi Norman Hirsh)***

Once or twice in a lifetime  
A man or woman may choose  
A radical leaving, having heard  
*Lech lecha* — Go forth.

God disturbs us toward our destiny  
By hard events  
And by freedom's now urgent voice  
Which explode and confirm who we are.

We don't like leaving,  
But God loves becoming.