

## Lech Lecha : Thoughts about Going Forth

### I. 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 יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ  
אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ:

וְאָעֲשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ וְאֶגְדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה:

וְאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶךָ אָאֹר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה:

### II. Pirkei d-Rebbe Eliezar 26

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

(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. Whence do we know of his tiltul? Because it is said, “Now the Eternal said to Avram, Go forth...” (Gen. 12:1).

### **III. Definition**

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

### **IV. Aviva Zornberg**

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.

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

### **IV. Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev**

Here is the rule: When you are uncertain if you should do something or not, pay attention: if you sense clarity in your thinking, in your inner awareness, then you should do this thing. This is the meaning of God's promise “I will show you” (areka): this word implies clarity of awareness.

An additional explanation: “YHVH said to Abram, ‘Go forth [from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show

you’]” (Gen. 12:1). This is a fundamental lesson: Wherever you might go, you are going to your root-source. Wherever you go, you must raise up the sparks in that place connected to your root-soul. That is what God meant in saying, “Go forth” (lekh lekha): go to yourself, on your own, to your source, and raise up those sparks.

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FOR FURTHER THOUGHT These three texts each lead us to awareness of where we are—in space, in time, in our lives—in each moment. The first two represent the experience of discernment as it emerges through spiritual practice. That is, as we develop an awareness of God in our lives, we may become more sensitive to the ways in which God moves in us, through us, with us—in time frames both large and small. Similarly, we may become sensitive to the push or pull of God on our hearts, leading us toward or holding us away from particular acts, directing us toward more wholesome decision making. Through careful personal attention, sometimes attended, witnessed, and encouraged by a companion, we might come to more clearly discern what God wants of us in the moment. That was God’s direction to Abraham: go “to the place I will show you”—watch out for the signs that indicate when and where it is appropriate to stay. I will show you where to stop and when to go. But, how was Abraham to know this? He could pay attention to external signs: “There was a famine in the land.” Alternatively, he might pay attention to the clarity of his awareness in the moment—how uncluttered his heart, how clear his ability to see, sense, respond—and employ that as a means of discernment.

## **V Home (Warsan Shire (poet from Somalia now living in London))**

no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you

breath bloody in their throats  
the boy you went to school with  
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory  
is holding a gun bigger than his body  
you only leave home  
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you  
fire under feet  
hot blood in your belly  
it's not something you ever thought of doing  
until the blade burnt threats into  
your neck  
and even then you carried the anthem under  
your breath  
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilet  
sobbing as each mouthful of paper  
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land

no one burns their palms  
under trains  
beneath carriages  
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck  
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled  
means something more than journey.  
no one crawls under fences  
no one wants to be beaten  
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps  
or strip searches where your  
body is left aching  
or prison,  
because prison is safer  
than a city of fire  
and one prison guard  
in the night  
is better than a truckload  
of men who look like your father  
no one could take it  
no one could stomach it  
no one skin would be tough enough

the  
go home blacks  
refugees  
dirty immigrants  
asylum seekers  
sucking our country dry  
niggers with their hands out  
they smell strange  
savage

messed up their country and now they want  
to mess ours up  
how do the words  
the dirty looks  
roll off your backs  
maybe because the blow is softer  
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender  
than fourteen men between  
your legs  
or the insults are easier  
to swallow  
than rubble  
than bone  
than your child body  
in pieces.

i want to go home,  
but home is the mouth of a shark  
home is the barrel of the gun  
and no one would leave home  
unless home chased you to the shore  
unless home told you  
to quicken your legs  
leave your clothes behind  
crawl through the desert  
wade through the oceans  
drown  
save  
be hunger  
beg  
forget pride  
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear  
saying-  
leave,  
run away from me now  
i dont know what i've become  
but i know that anywhere  
is safer than here

## **VI. 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.