



Covenant & Conversation



Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

LECH LECHA • 77 77

STUDIES IN SPIRITUALITY

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"צז

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

"I have loved the Torah of R' Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah.

An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives." — Rabbi Sacks

Journey of the Generations

● This summary is adapted from this week's main Covenant & Conversation essay by Rabbi Sacks, available at <https://www.rabbi­sacks.org/covenant-conversation/lech-lecha/journey-of-the-generations/>

One of the great discoveries that tends to come with age is that, having spent what seems like a lifetime running away from our parents, we realise we have become very much like them. It takes time and distance to see how much we owe our parents and how much of them lives on in us. The Torah teaches us this through the story of Avraham.

Parshat Lech Lecha, and indeed Jewish history, begins with the words, "God said to Avraham, 'Go from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, to a land I will show you.'" (Bereishit 12:1) But if we go back and read the story again, we realise the significance of the passage at the end of the *previous parsha*. It says this:

Terach took his son Avram, his grandson Lot (son of Haran), and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Avram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. (Ber. 11:31)

It turns out that Avraham left his father's house *long after* he had left his land and his birthplace. *Terach, Avraham's father, accompanied him for the first half of his journey. He went with his son at least part of the way.*

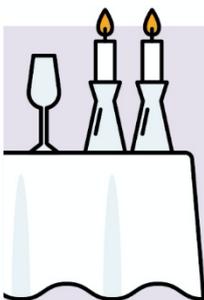
There are two possible explanations. The first is that Avraham received his call from God and Terach agreed to go with him, intending to accompany him all the way to the land of Canaan, though he did not complete the journey, perhaps because he grew too frail. The second is that the call came to Avraham when he was

in Haran, in which case *his father had already begun this journey on his own initiative* by leaving Ur. Either way, the break between Avraham and his father was far less dramatic than we first thought.

When we are young we hear the midrashic story of Avraham breaking his father's idols, with its message that a child can sometimes be right and a parent wrong, especially when it comes to spirituality and faith. Only much later in life do we learn the far deeper truth, that *Avraham was actually completing a journey his father began.*

Avram – Avraham's original name – means "mighty father." Avraham himself was chosen to be forefather of the Jewish people. How could a child who rejected the way of his father become a father of children who would not reject his way in turn? It makes more sense to say that Terach already had doubts about idolatry and it was he who inspired Avraham to go further, spiritually and physically. Avraham continued the journey his father had initiated, thereby teaching Yitzchak and Yaacov, his son and grandson, to chart their own ways of serving God – the same God, but one who they were free to discover in their own individual ways.

Often we begin by thinking how different we are from our parents. It takes time for us to appreciate how much they helped us to become the people we are. *Even when we think we are running away, we are in fact continuing their journey. Much of what we are is because of what they were.*



Around the Shabbat Table

1. How are you similar to your parents, and how are you different?
2. Are you continuing the journey your parents began?
3. If Terach worshipped idols, why do you think it is important for Rabbi Sacks to suggest that Avraham was still influenced by him and continued his journey?



Keep Going

by Dr. Erica Brown

Back when Rabbi Sacks was Principal of Jews' College, I was one of his Masters' students. I remember how, with his usual stirring voice and presence, he talked about the mandate and meaning of 'Lech Lecha' to continue a journey, rather than to start one. Avraham's father, Terach, was the first to leave Ur for Canaan but died on the way. So Avraham completed what his father started.

Rabbi Sacks then went on to speak about all the journeys, projects, and assignments that we begin but never finish. We make resolutions we cannot keep. Sometimes a person we love and respect dies before completing a significant goal, just like in Avraham's family. And sometimes, we pick up where others left off. I remember of a friend whose father died while in the middle of studying Talmud in the daily Daf Yomi cycle. This friend took it upon himself to continue from the very page where his father left off and complete the cycle in honor of his father's devotion.

I've shared this Torah wisdom in Rabbi Sacks' name for decades when someone I know and love is stuck in the middle of a project and cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel. "Lech Lecha. Keep going. You'll get there!" I've shared it with my children and with my students. Rabbi Sacks' interpretation continues to inspire me when I'm stuck in that tunnel myself. His reading of the first words of Lech Lecha always helps to prod me forward.

● Dr. Erica Brown is the Director of the Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership.



A CLOSER LOOK

● Delving deeper into the thoughts shared by Rabbi Sacks on Lech Lecha,

Erica Brown discusses her reflections on the main piece of the week.

Which thought will stay with you from *Journey of the Generations*?

For the first time, I thought about the Hebrew root for an adolescent, N-A-R, and its links to the words 'awakening' and 'shaking.' These transitional teenage years really change our relationships with our parents; we tend to lean into our peer groups as we begin to define ourselves and think about who we want to be. That was certainly true for me and my own journey to Judaism as an adolescent. Sometimes only later in life do we return and re-evaluate the wisdom of parents and relatives, and only then can we begin to understand how to transform the tension of generations into learning moments for the ages.

What inspired you in this week's sedra?

Avraham left for Canaan at the age of 75. I don't know many adults who, at that age, would have the courage to explore a profoundly alternate path in a new place. Avraham, as the first Jew, set the stage for all of us to approach 'aging as sage-ing'. When is the last time you did something for the first time? I think that's the question Avraham asks of each of us.

What is your favourite quote from Rabbi Sacks this week, and why?

"Even when we thought we were running away, we were in fact continuing their journey. Much of what we are is because of what they were." This quote has helped me appreciate that individuation may be best imagined as a circle of return, rather than a line moving away from its beginnings. I think Judaism values a cyclical approach to time because it mirrors the cyclical nature of human development and signals the importance of personal growth.



TORAH TRIVIA

🔍 Can you find a hint in the text that supports the idea that Terach moved away from idolatry and did *teshuvah*?

▲ In Bereishit 15:15, Hashem promises Avraham, "and you shall come to your ancestors in peace." Rashi explains that this is a hint to the fact that Avraham would join his father Terach, who had done *teshuvah* (Bereishit Rabbah 63:12).

● Adapted from Torah IQ by David Woolf, a collection of 1500 Torah riddles, available worldwide on Amazon.