



TABLE TALK: LECH-LECHA

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Roaming too long on the Internet can make a person feel nomadic. Yes, you're free. Yes, it's easy to make quick connections. Yes, you see and learn new things. But you're also alone, you may grow inured to new ideas, dulled to even strong emotions, lacking attachment.

In the first portions of the Torah, God has seen Noah and Adam fail to establish the kind of community God wants. In this week's Torah portion, Lech-Lecha, when God calls upon Abram, God's approach is different. Instead of relying on an individual to take responsibility, God promises to give his people a land of their own, a place where they can build a community, where they can not only read and talk about God's values but attempt to live them. In so doing they will be a light to the nations as to how they too might live.

Why does that make such a difference? And have we lived up to God's expectations?

One hundred years ago, when the Balfour Declaration announced support for a Jewish homeland, some Zionists viewed the homeland in pragmatic terms. A Jewish homeland would be a refuge, a place that would ensure the survival of the Jewish people. But God's pact with Abram suggests that God saw a homeland as doing more than that. God wanted the descendants of Abram to have a home so they could sustain one another, so they could live the principles laid out in the Torah. The goal was to create a truly holy society where everyone was treated as one created in the image of God, where the earth would be respected—a society worthy of God's presence.

What's the point in living in a community or belonging to a religious group or interacting with friends on Facebook? Why do we belong to any community? Is it to assuage our doubts about the randomness of the universe? Is it to live more purposefully? Is it to sustain and support those around us? The story of God and Abram would suggest that the latter is not to be overlooked.

For this week's Shabbat dinner, try these questions:

1. Which would be hardest for you? Leaving your country, your religion, or your family? Why?
2. Why does God instruct Abram to "Go forth"? The literal meaning of the phrase is "betake yourself." Are God's instructions more personal than geographical? Why?
3. Do you think of Israel today more as a refuge for Jews or as a place that embodies the ideals of the Torah? Why?

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