

CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

5775

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 31 October 2014 - 7 Cheshvan 5775
Sedra Lech Lecha

ALWAYS ADVANCING

IN JEWISH LIFE NAMES ARE VERY SIGNIFICANT. THIS IS SO FOR NAMES of people, and also for the names of the weekly Torah readings, the Sedra. This week the Hebrew name of the Sedra¹ means “Go”. It is about moving forward, advancing. G-d tells Abraham, the first Jew: “Go!”.

The Sages tell us that this is a message to every one of his descendants. For each person, life is a process of movement, always advancing.

When we look at the beginning of the Sedra this message seems clear. G-d commands Abraham to travel towards the Land of Israel. For him and his beautiful wife Sarah, life is going to change: they are both advancing towards the fulfilment of their destiny as the great teachers of Monotheism for the world. The Sedra tells us that they enter the Holy Land, and then continue to travel, moving towards the eventual site of Jerusalem².

So far, so good. Every step made by Abraham and Sarah was positive, reaching closer and closer to the highest ideals of goodness and holiness. Then we meet a problem.



In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin
(Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772
Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'

JUDAISM FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD
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This is in the next section of the Sedra. There is a famine in the Land of Israel; Abraham and Sarah decide to avoid it by going to Egypt. When they get there Pharaoh's officers think that Sarah would be a fitting companion for their master, and have her taken to the palace. There is an atmosphere of gloom and danger. However, G-d protects Sarah, and eventually she and Abraham are able to leave.

At last they are safe, but we are left with a question. How can this be called "advance"? The journey to the Holy Land was positive movement, but the descent into Egypt with all the problems that ensued seems something negative. Yet, according to the Rabbis, the name "advance" applies to this section too. Whether you go up or you go down, you are advancing! How can this be?

In this account of the life of the first Jewish couple, we learn a central concept about the nature of the Jew. Every step in life is indeed a step forward, whatever it may look like at the time.

There are different kinds of 'descent' and false steps. Some are the result of external causes; others we erroneously choose ourselves. At that moment it is wrong. Nonetheless, ultimately this step too is an advance, a movement forward.

Why? Because wherever we are, in every situation, there are certain spiritual connections which we have to make. They are waiting for each person; only he or she can carry out that special task, which has to do with the unique spiritual capabilities of each individual.

The kabbalists describe this as a process in which each person reveals and gathers the Divine 'sparks' which are hidden in every situation in life. It is in this sense that every movement is an advance, even when it seems a retreat or even a fall. As soon as we realise that it is negative, we find a way to transform it into something positive. The fall becomes an incentive to reach higher.

Thus wherever we go, we have a task to complete, guided by G-d, and every step is indeed a step forward, towards Redemption³.

1. Genesis chs.12-17. 2. Gen. 12:9, see Rashi. This was a significant city, Salem, even in Abraham's time. See commentaries to Gen. 14:18. 3. Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 5, p.57ff.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA LECH LECHA

ALTHOUGH YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND...

The Year 5 class was in the middle of their history lesson. Mr. Marks stood in front of the class, talking about the Jewish people in the Middle Ages. Then he set the boys a task to do in pairs, and they all seemed very interested and involved.

At the end of class, Mr. Marks dismissed the boys. As Izzy Adler passed by his desk, he said quietly, "Izzy, please stay behind here. I want to ask you something."

Izzy looked longingly at the classroom door. He wanted to play ball with his friends. But he nodded obediently and stayed behind.

"Izzy," Mr. Adler said once all the boys had left the classroom, "You handed in a wonderful essay yesterday, describing the Jews of medieval Norwich. I was really impressed by it." He smiled warmly at his student. "But there's just one problem." He took out Izzy's essay from his work case and showed it to Izzy. "You see how you've written it? It's not so neat." Izzy looked at it. It wasn't so bad. He shrugged his shoulders.

"So, please Izzy. I want you to write up the essay again - for tomorrow. All right?"

Izzy frowned. "You want me to write it up again? But why? It's not so bad. And anyway, who cares what the handwriting looks like as long as you can read it? It's the content that counts!" "True, but still, I want you to write it up again really neatly."

Izzy looked angry. Mr. Marks handed him the paper and smiled. "I'll see you tomorrow."

That night, Izzy told his father what happened. "It's not fair," he complained. "I really worked hard on this essay – and the handwriting isn't so bad. I don't understand why Mr. Marks wants me to do it again!"

"You know Izzy," Mr. Adler said, "I understand how you're feeling. But maybe Mr. Marks has a reason and he just didn't tell you. There is a Jewish idea that sometimes we have to do things even if we don't understand why. Like Abraham our forefather. In this week's Sedra, G-d commands him to leave his house and travel. He doesn't even tell him where! And he has to leave his familiar surroundings behind! Abraham didn't ask why, though. He was a holy man. He trusted in G-d and went, even though he didn't even know where he was going!"

"Wow!" Izzy exclaimed.

"So, I think that if Abraham was able to leave his home without knowing why, you can rewrite the essay neatly for Mr. Marks without knowing." Mr. Adler winked at Izzy. Izzy smiled, and began working on his essay.

The next afternoon, he handed it to his teacher. Mr. Marks beamed when he saw the neat handwriting spread across the page. "I'm so impressed that you did it again! I wasn't able to tell you yesterday, because it wasn't official. Tomorrow, an inspector is coming into the school to see how all the students here are getting on and I wanted to show him your beautiful essay. So it was especially important that it looks really neat!"

Izzy grinned. *Daddy was right*, he was thinking. *There was a reason. I just didn't know what it was - but that's OK. I can still do the right thing without knowing why....*

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