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שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 26 October 2012 - 10 Cheshvan 5773
Sedra Lech Lecha

RAGS TO RICHES

A COMMON THEME IN LIFE IS THE 'RAGS TO RICHES' STORY. A person is born and brought up in modest surroundings, with simple parents. The story then might continue in a number of ways. One is that he leaves school at sixteen, becomes a barrow boy in the market and some years later is the chairman of a large business corporation. Another is that from his local school he wins a scholarship to Oxbridge and eventually becomes a famous scientist.

This pattern of leaving one's background in order to conquer new frontiers has many variations. It is intriguing the way that although, of course, this is not restricted to Jews, nonetheless it is a typically Jewish story.

Perhaps this is because the same pattern is seen in the life of first Jew, Abraham, the hero of our Sedra¹. G-d tells him "Go for yourself, from your land, from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you". This means movement, not in economic terms, but in a more general and global way, leading to Abraham and Sarah's great future.



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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The Sages explain that this is really the basis of life for the Jewish people as a whole, Abraham and Sarah's descendants. We move out of our past, step by step, into a new and unbounded future, defined only as "the Land which I - meaning G-d Himself - will show you."

What did Abraham leave behind? Three different aspects of his origin. The first was his 'land'. This does not mean simply a geographical area. The term 'land' suggests also the basic, earthly ground of one's character. In order to advance, this basic nature often has to be transcended, especially if one is seeking spiritual goals.

The second term, "your birthplace", suggests all the limitations of one's environment. We Jews are undeniably affected by the cultures in which we live. Sometimes the typical rags to riches story describes a person becoming thoroughly a part of that culture in a very successful way: from barrow boy to the House of Lords. Yet at this point there is also the challenge to transcend the limitations of prevailing culture and to be able to be oneself, as a Jewish man or woman, maintaining Jewish values. Mix with Royalty, and be served kosher food in the Palace.

The third phrase is "your father's house". This can be understood quite literally as home background and early education. While in most rags to riches stories there is an important debt to something that was gained at home and in school, even more so there is a leap beyond. This is yet more obvious when considered in spiritual terms. The path of Jewish discovery leads to exciting new territories of the spirit, often quite different from anything one has experienced before: for example, discovering the intense joy of Torah study.

Thus each one of us is Abraham or Sarah, leaving our natural origins behind and advancing to the Land which G-d Himself will show us. This means both the physical Land of Israel, and also every kind of new domain to which G-d leads us. There we can truly discover the untold wealth of what it means to be a Jew...²

1. Genesis chs.12-17. 2. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Sefer HaSichot 5750* vol.1 p.96 ff.

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SEDRA LECH LECHA

JUST LIKE ABRAHAM

'Danny, raise your head and start listening to what is being said in the classroom, please'. Danny jerked up his head and tried to put on a paying-attention look.

This time he had not been sleeping, his head had been down because he was busy thinking about his family moving to another city. First of all, what was he going to do about his friends? Everything was going to be new and all the things in his life that he'd been used to in the past would be gone, very soon. The future did not look bright for him.

'At least you won't have Rabbi Katzen as an alarm clock all day long', Eli, his friend, had comforted him earlier on the way to school. Danny smiled at Eli's sense of humour. Everybody knew about Danny's falling-asleep-in-class problem as well as the fact that Rabbi Katzen was forever waking him up. But Danny *did* enjoy listening to Rabbi Katzen's classes when he wasn't sleepy; like now...

'...And G-d said to Abraham, "Go from your land, away from your father's house and everything that is precious to you in your life and go far away to a country which I will show you."

'G-d did not even tell Abraham where his destination was, He only said to him "go!", Rabbi Katzen explained to the class. 'Abraham had complete faith in G-d that everything was going to turn out okay, as the Sedra continues, 'And Abraham went, just as G-d told him'.

Danny felt as if Rabbi Katzen had been talking to him, because what Rabbi Katzen was describing sounded just like what was happening to him.

He too was leaving his school and all his friends behind and moving to a new place - to make a new beginning, just as Abraham was doing in the Sedra.

'And the lesson from Abraham,' continued Rabbi Katzen, now looking directly at Danny, 'is that no matter where we must go or what we have to do we should always trust in G-d that it will turn out right. Because at the end of the day it is G-d Who decides what will happen to us and where we will end up. But we have the choice to enjoy and make the most of every situation in which we find ourselves.

'And the main thing is to trust in G-d and be happy. This is the greatest Mitzvah of all, because when we are happy even the greatest challenge, like leaving everything behind and starting up in a new place becomes a good experience...'

Suddenly Danny felt good. It was exciting to be moving, he thought to himself.

Just like Abraham.

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