

D'var Lech L'cha – Friday 30 October 2020 – Matt Banks

- In this week's parasha, Avram gets the Divine memo: *lech l'cha mei'artz'cha umi'molad't'cha umi'beit avicha*, "go from your land from your birth place father's house to a land that I will show you."
- *Lech l'cha*: an odd turn of phrase. "go to yourself", as if he's being instructed to begin an inward spiritual journey. It's a journey he initiates for himself, for his descendants, for all of us. And so it is our journey as well.
- The midrash on this text begins with a quote from Psalms about a daughter who needs to forget her people and fathers house. Kind of harsh, but it's saying essentially that he needs to find a new way of being. Avram, you need to try something different, because what you're doing so far isn't working for you. That's what Avram was looking for.
- It continues with a parable that is especially relevant today. A person is traveling along and comes upon a castle engulfed in flame, and the person asks, "is there anyone in charge here? Why isn't anyone dealing with the flames?" At which point the owner pops their head up and says, "I am the master of this castle."
- The analogy that is drawn is that God is the master of the castle, and the question is does the universe have anyone looking after it? And God says yes.
- Very reassuring.
- Except it's on fire, and apparently God isn't putting out the flames. Maybe God isn't detail oriented in that way.
- It seems to me that the message is, we're supposed to douse the flames. It's our job.
- That's what is meant by a new way of being in the world.
- The S'fat Emet takes this midrash and gives us some guidance on what that new way of being looks like.
- He begins by stating that of course we are all born to a particular purpose, that there is something we are destined to set right. And the person who does that is called Tzaddik, a righteous one, someone who knows right from wrong and calls it out.
- But Avraham was a Chasid, someone who acted out of chesed, loving kindness. And the S'fat Emet teaches that when you act to heal the world from a place of loving kindness, you initiate a divine flow of blessing that emanates from your soul, and the result is not something that you can conceptualize, categorize, intellectualize. Rather it makes accessible a direct relationship with experience, with all the people and beings and things in your life. Not a transactional relationship but one that offers a direct knowing, a direct connection.
- It engenders an openness that allows you to see the connections between all living things, between all aspects of experience. The connections that make us one human family, that make us one family of beings, that make us one with everything that was is and will be.
- And it is on Shabbat when that feeling of connection is most readily accessible, when we drop all the doing and focus instead on being.
- My prayer for all of us is that we find especially on this Shabbat a moment or two of peace, of pure being, when we can sit quietly and observe with equanimity all that is beautiful and all that is not, the joy and hope, the fear and anxiety, and find in that silence and space some wholeness and healing, and that we can carry those moments with us to the new lands we'll explore in the coming week.