

Go forth!

Lekh Lekha.

Hebrew for "Go-you-forth."

With these words begins God's call to Abraham (here called Abram) to leave his homeland and kin and to go "to the land that I will show you" (12:1). A simple command? The wisdom passed down through generations of Jewish Torah commentators reveals interpretative subtleties. E.g.,

"*Go by yourself.* This is one journey which must be made alone" (Hirsch);

"*Go to yourself,* go to your roots, to find your potential" (Chasidic interpretation);

"*Go for yourself,* for your pleasure and for your benefit. There, I will make of you a great nation; whereas here you do not merit having children..." (Rashi).

"Abraham, what did YOU hear that day?" Ponder this question. Put yourself in the shoes of Abraham. What makes a wealthy man living in ancient Mesopotamia leave all that is familiar for the sake of a land and future as yet unknown? Is he, as stories from Jewish tradition suggest, spiritually restless? Can restlessness be a search for God?

The Ramban (13th c. Jewish scholar) said that "one should love God with an excessive, powerful love, till one's soul is totally involved in love of God, and one is constantly obsessed by it, as though ill with love sickness..." Does this describe Abraham? Does his restlessness reveal a passionate lover of God, prepared to risk all, to follow God anywhere?

And what of Abraham's wife, Sarah (here called Sarai)? We are told in Gen. 11:30 that "Sarai was barren; she had no child." And yet four verses later, God is promising Abram, "I will make of you a great nation" (12:2)! Now doesn't the text have you puzzling over that?

Your puzzling is a clue that a powerful biblical insight is at hand...

In rabbinic commentary we hear that "Wherever it is written 'there is not', there eventually is."¹ Or, to quote a Christian biblical scholar of our own times: "Barrenness...is an effective metaphor for hopelessness. The marvel of biblical faith is that barrenness is the arena of God's life-giving action."²

Just when the situation seems hopeless, the divine word breaks through, inviting a creative response. A husband and wife, cloaked in restlessness, disappointment, but also in hope, set out together for a far land. *Lekh Lekha*. They "go forth" with a new kind of faith in the God of surprises.

Reflect: Restlessness... wandering... disappointments... daring new adventures... how are these realities woven into your own story of life and faith? Can you relate to Abraham, to Sarah, to the family left behind?

Remember: Never be tempted to just "settle". Keep learning. Keep asking questions. Never give up. Keep an open mind and heart. No answer is ever final. The love of God opens up infinite possibilities.

1. Bereshit Rabbah 38:14

2. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 116.

This article is based on a teaching by Br Jack Driscoll, CFC, PhD.

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