**Parashat Lech L’cha MSC 11/5/22**

Names, Journeys and Destinations

How fitting that our service today coincides with the reading of Parashat Lech L’cha, which begins with the awesome and ambiguous directive: *“Vayomer Adomai el Avram lech l’cha MeArtz’cha U-mi-moladt’cha u-mi-beit Avicha el ha aretz asher areka”* – “God says to Avram: Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to ***the land that I will show you.”***Avram doesn’t know where that land is, how to get there, and what to expect when he arrives.

Our Midrash, or Rabbinical interpretation of the text, tells us that Avram is 75 years old when he receives God’s instructions, and we have no idea how he’s spent those last 75 years. We do know that he has a father, Terah, two brothers (although one of them, Haran, died), and a wife, Sarai. Biblical commentary attempts to fill in the blanks, surmising that God chose Avram because he was the first to declare his belief in one God, thus becoming the father of the Jewish people.

It does become clear later that Canaan is, indeed, the destination of choice, but I imagine that it must’ve been a bit scary on Avram’s end, not being a spring chicken himself, to leave the only place he has ever called home, uproot his family and venture out into the unknown. But Avram doesn’t ignore this call: he doesn’t even question it, he doesn’t argue, he just goes.

Names play an important role in this narrative. Perhaps as a reward for his loyalty, God changes Avram’s name to Avraham (father of a multitude of nations) and his wife Sarai is renamed Sarah (princess). The added “hay” in both names represents an abbreviated name of God. One of 70 in the Bible, actually.

Two of them are spotlighted in this parashah: one that God reveals: “El Shaddai,” and one that Hagar, Sarah’s handmaid, gives God: “El Roi: God who sees me.”

Many other momentous events take place in this Parashah: famine, intrigue, deception, warfare and jealousy; the birth of Avraham’s first son, Ishmael; Avraham’s attempt to pass Sarah off as his sister in order to save his own skin; and the very first circumcisions on record!

But today we’re going to circle back to what really resonates for us: the directive Lech L’Cha: go or walk to yourself! Midrash interprets this to mean, “Go forth to find your authentic self, to learn who you are meant to be.” In other words, leave the place where you are most comfortable, both inside and outside of yourself – and venture into the unknown, with the faith that this new place is where you were destined to go. And I do think that, although God didn’t speak directly to us (or at least not to me), God has nudged us to begin this new journey to find a Makom Shelanu: A Place for Us.

Neither of us could’ve predicted, not even two years after we met each other – at a Brite Divinity School program no less – that we would be here: in a new congregation with this perfect new name, creating new Jewish communal connections. But things just fell into place. And when the opportunity presented itself, we “walked to ourselves” and listened to what our hearts and minds – (and maybe even God) – were telling us.

We realize – just as Nachshon dipped his toe into the Sea of Reeds before it parted – we are dipping our toes into uncharted waters – but we are confident that this is a risk worth taking.

And now, as we stand in a room filled with people who believe this is a journey worth beginning, we recognize that many of us may have different and exciting ideas on where this journey might lead.

This community is committed to recognizing all people on their own various journeys of “going to themselves.” So, as we dip our toe in like Nachshon, we also look ahead to the land of Canaan and wonder, what does the land of milk and honey look like for this community?

We look forward to finding out.

Shabbat Shalom