

Parashat Lech Lecha:
What is Your Formative Mitzvah? What is the Movement of Your Life?
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Dear Friends,

This week's parasha begins with the commandment which changed the face of humanity: "Now the LORD said to Abram: 'Go forth, out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.'" (Bereishit 12:1)

This is the first commandment that God commands Avraham our forefather. Go, He tells him. Go always; Go your whole life. Go, and do not stop. Go, and do not become stuck. Go towards the horizon that I will continuously show you.

And from this moment onwards, Avraham does not stop Going. He insists on maintaining his status as a stranger - in Egypt, in Grar, and even in the Promised Land - just so that he can be in motion continuously. When he dares think that perhaps he has gotten to a place where he can rest, he is sent forth again - away from his comfort zone - and told to sacrifice all that is familiar to him and become an outsider again.

This is the nature of the first commandment of a person's life – the first commandment that anyone hears is that which forms his or her existence, and it is the impetus for the movement which defines their life.

Let's look at the first commandment given to the other heroes of the Torah. Notice the movement they contain as a result of the commandment:

The first mitzvah given to Adam and Eve is: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creeps upon the earth." (Bereishit 1:28)

The first mitzvah given to Cain a moment before he murders his brother Hevel is: "If you carry yourself well; And if you do not, sin couches at the door; and unto you is its desire, but you may rule over it." (Bereishit 4:7)

The first mitzvah given to Noah is: " And God said to Noah: 'The end of all flesh is come before Me... Make you an ark of gopher wood...' (Bereishit 6:13-14)

The first mitzvah given to Yitzchak is: "Go not down to Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell you of. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you;" (Bereishit 26:2-3)

The first mitzvah given to Yaakov in his dream is: "I am the LORD...The land whereon you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed. And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south." (Bereishit 28: 13-14)

The first mitzvah Moshe is given is: "Put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)

The first mitzvah that Aharon is given (although it is given through Moshe), is: "And you shall speak to him, and put the words in his mouth; ... And he shall be your spokesman to the people; and it shall come to pass, that he shall be to you a mouth." (Exodus 4:14-16)

The first mitzvah that Am Yisrael is given is: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me." (Exodus 20:2)

The first mitzvah indicates the hidden point at which one's material and spiritual worlds meet. It is at this point that the highest voice we are able to hear is heard – the voice of the Creator. That voice is not a one-time event. Usually the first time the voice is heard occurs in childhood or adolescence, but it continues to echo throughout a person's life. It is rare that the voice changes.

It often happens that a person understands the voice and its commandment only in retrospect, later in life, as he looks back and tries to make sense of his life's journey.

This parasha begins with the command "Lech Lecha", and ends with the mitzvah of brit milah. Metaphorically, the orlah (literally, the foreskin), is a barrier between the material and the spiritual. It is the barrier that does not want to hear the higher voice. It prefers the other voices within us – those that urge us to stop and get stuck; that ask us to waste energy on insignificant things and to prevent the great movement of our life from proceeding through us and with us.

Our Sages relate that Avraham is called "Ivri" because the entire world is on one side ("Ever", in Hebrew), and Avraham and his followers are on the other. While the rest of the world is proceeding on its anticipated path, Avraham is forging new ones. When the rest of the world is imprisoned by what is safe, known, and familiar, he is

daring to remove the orlah from his eyes, his ears, and his heart, and enabling the blessing of Hessed and Divine abundance to burst into his world.

Avoda Shebalev: Service of the Heart:

We are able to hear the Divine "Avrahamic" voice only within us. It is futile to look for an external voice to guide us on our life's journey. Therefore, we must listen within ourselves.

If we do not hear that voice, we can be sure that it is there, but we have not yet tuned into it or that there is an orlah separating us from it. Therefore, we can look at our lives retrospectively and notice its formative movement. What is the direction in which our life has flowed?

When you look back, notice – is there an interesting motif that repeats itself? If what we notice is exciting, gladdening and energizing, this is a sign that it is authentic and of Divine origin. If not, then the voice we hear is only the everyday stirring of our heart. In this case, there is probably an invisible orlah covering our eyes and our hearts, and preventing us from hearing the voice that is trying to be heard.

I will soon be 54. I can definitely look back for the formative movement in my life, and as I listen to the direction that excites me, I can see the path forward:

Look inwards at all times

Look deeper; and deeper!

If you think you've arrived, know that it is temporary.

Look for the Divine, the infinite that exists in everything.

Follow the essence - the spirit that exists in everything.

Look for that which manifests everything that has been created.

See that it is good. If you cannot see it is good, you are not yet done looking - keep searching.

Look for the blessing, because the Divine, the Essence, is always a blessing.

Use your mind, but also be aware of the physical sensations in your body - they will tell you whether you are on the right path.

How about you? What is the essential movement of your life? What is the mitzvah that is evident and formative to that movement? If you would like to share, I would love to hear!

We, as the children of Avraham, continue to journey, to develop, to renew ourselves, to demand progress. We continue to remove the orlah of the heart which prevents us from hearing the Divine voice - peeling it off a little at a time, over and over again. Because the orlah, just like the Divine voice, never ceases, and is not a one-time occurrence. And each action of peeling is painful all over again.

Shabbat Shalom,
Elisha