

## *Parashat Lekh Lekha*

# Introductions

In *Parashat Lekh Lekha* we are “introduced” to Avraham Avinu. The Torah does not tell us much about Avraham (that void is filled by many midrashim). Rather, we are immediately thrown into the first command directed to Avraham, enjoining him to go forth from his homeland:

ויאמר ה' אל אברם, לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ  
אשר אראך. (בראשית יב:א)

And Hashem said to Abram, “Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.” (*Bereshit* 12:1)

Is this really an introduction? There is a stark contrast between Avraham’s introduction and the introduction to Noach in last week’s *parasha*. The Torah immediately gives some color to Noach’s personality when he is first introduced to us:

אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו את האלוקים התהלך  
נח. (בראשית ו:ט)

These are the generations of Noach: Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with God. (*Bereshit* 6:9)

The Torah introduces Noach as a *tzaddik*, a righteous man. That's an introduction! We are immediately informed of his greatness. Yet, Avraham's introduction is absent. There are no adjectives that describe Avraham's greatness. In fact, it appears as if there is no introduction to Avraham whatsoever. The Torah just introduces "Avraham," with his command from Hashem to leave his current location. How are we to understand this contrast with respect to the distinct introductions of Avraham and Noach?

The Gemara (Taanit 21a) tells a story about Rav Yochanan and Ilfa. The two were learning together in yeshiva and were very poor, so they decided it was time to return home to start families and earn a living. On their way home, they stopped near a rickety wall to eat lunch. While they were there, Rav Yochanan heard an angel say, "The walls should collapse on these individuals, since they are abandoning eternal life for temporal life." The other angel responded that they couldn't do that because one of them was destined for greatness in Torah. Rav Yochanan turned to Ilfa and asked if he heard the dialogue among the angels. Ilfa was puzzled, as he did not hear any such dialogue. Rav Yochanan understood that if he heard the dialogue, they must have been referring to him. Rav Yochanan immediately decided to return to yeshiva to continue to dedicate all his time to learning Torah. Subsequently, Rav Yochanan becomes a renowned scholar.

Several times, the Gemara cites Ilfa as saying that had he returned to yeshiva, he could have become the leading Torah sage of the generation. The Gemara seems to fault Ilfa for not returning to yeshiva. Is that really fair? Is it Ilfa's fault? He didn't hear the conversation between the angels. Had he heard the conversation, perhaps, like Rav Yochanan, he would have headed back to the yeshiva as well.

The commentators explain that both Ilfa and Rav Yochanan *could* have heard the voice, but only Rav Yochanan was tuned into the divine frequency. He heard the voice loud and clear. So often in life does HaKadosh Barukh Hu speak to us in so many different ways. But do we hear what He is saying? Do we hear Hashem guiding us, instructing

us, and hinting to us which path to choose? The greatest introduction that we can give to someone is that they heard God's voice. Avraham is introduced as someone who hears the voice and follows through on that first command that he receives from Hashem. The first Jew heard the voice, understood it without questioning it, and immediately acted upon it, without hesitation. We need to "tune in" so we can hear Hashem's voice and act accordingly as well.