

Bereshit 12:1-5 (Lech L'cha)

1. God said to Avram, "Go, take yourself from your land and from where you were born, and from your father's house to the land that I will let you see:

2. I will make you a great nation
And I will bless you,
I will make your name great.
And be a blessing.

3. I will bless those people who bless you
And those that curse you, I will curse;
And all the families of the earth shall find blessing through you."

4. Avram went, as God had told him,
and Lot went with him.
And Avram was seventy-five years old
when he went out of Haran.

5. Avram took Sarai, his wife,
and Lot, his brother's son,
and all their belongings that they had gained,
and the people they had made their own
in Haran; and they went to go to the land of Canaan.



יב לך לך
ויאמר יהוה אל-אברם לך-לך
מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל-
הארץ אשר אראך:
2 ויאעשה לְגֹי גָדוֹל
וּאֲבָרְכָךְ
וְאֶגְדְּלָה שְׁמִי
וְהָיָה בְרָכָה:
3 וְאֲבָרְכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ
וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אָאֹר
וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ
כָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה:
4 וַיֵּלֶךְ אֲבָרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהִים וַיֵּלֶךְ
אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאֲבָרָם בֶּן-חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים
שָׁנָה בִּצְאָתוֹ מִחָרָן: 5 וַיִּקַּח אֲבָרָם אֶת-
שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו וְאֶת-כָּל-
רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת-הַנַּפֶּשׁ אֲשֶׁר-
עָשׂוּ בַּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנַעַן
וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶצָה כְּנַעַן: 5



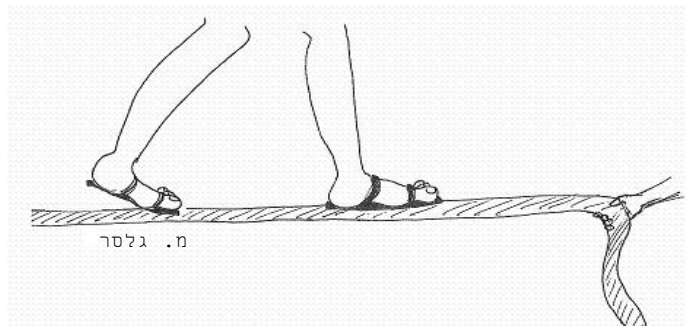
Leading Idea: Thinking about Journeys and Journeying

The books of Bereshit and Shemot are full of journeys. Several ideas are explored here that prepare students for the pieces of narratives that they will encounter. In this regard the first set of discussion plans and activities can act as induction exercises to 'journeying' in general, as well as being used to explore more deeply questions students raise. Attention is drawn here to two aspects of journeying that can prepare students for thinking about this Parashah.

- (i) The meaning of journeying – what makes something a journey and what does journeying involve?
- (ii) The act of going on a journey – what do the things people take on a journey tell us about the kind of journey they are on?
- (ii) Ancient journeys – journeys weren't always taken in a car – What earlier modes of transport were there? What reasons led people to travel? What might the journey look like?

Discussion Plan: Journeys and Journeying

1. Does a journey always have a beginning? *Explain*
2. Does a journey always have an end? *If not, can you give an example?*
3. Could a trip to the end of the street become a journey?
4. If I start walking but end up back where I started from, have I taken a journey?
5. Can I take a journey without moving at all?
6. Can journeys be good or bad, or is it the things that happen on them that are good or bad?
7. Is there a difference between going somewhere on my own and going somewhere with my family or friends? If so, what are some of the differences?
8. In what ways might a journey change you?
9. In what ways might a journey surprise you?
10. Is there a difference between being told "get into the car we are going out" and "get into the car we are going to the movies"- does being told where you are going make a difference?



Leading Idea: The Multiple Meanings of Lech L'cha

'Lech l'cha' is generally taken as an expression meaning "Go forth". But this isn't the only way of reading it. While Lech l'cha on its own is a command (like sit! or stop!), lech on its own means 'go' and l'cha' on its own generally means 'to you'. What might these mean when put together? In this unit we explore the following different readings of the phrase 'Lechl'cha'.

Exercise: Journeys

This exercise strengthens our reasoning skills by asking us to reason toward the best explanation. If you set out with these items on a journey:

- 1. Where might you be going?*
 - 2. What might you be planning to do?*
 - 3. How might you be planning on getting there?*
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- a) Sunscreen, a water bottle, a plastic bucket and big towel
 - b) A chocolate cake, a change of clothes, a present wrapped in wrapping paper, and a train ticket.
 - c) A tent, a backpack, marshmallows and hiking boots.
 - d) A Plastic rubbish bag, a long stick and rubber gloves.

As a variation, in pairs prepare to tell the story of this journey to the rest of the group.

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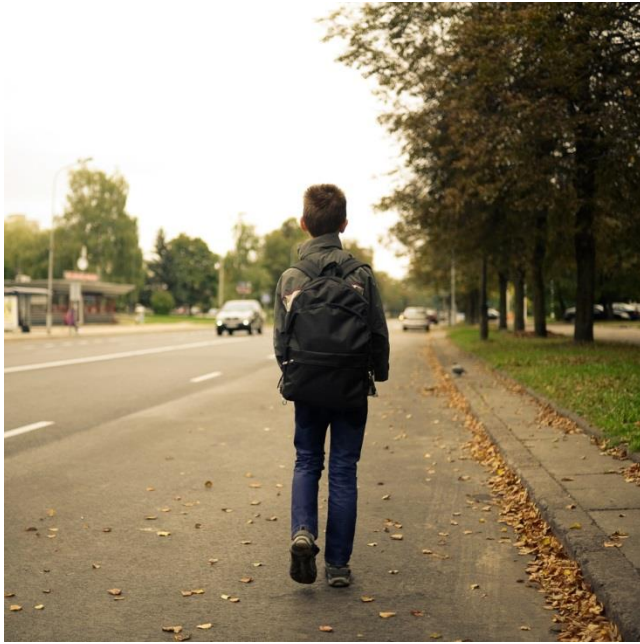
Exercise: The Multiple Meanings of “*Lech L’cha*”

Read the sentence on the left – what kind of journey do you think this is?

	Going to another place	Getting to know yourself better	Becoming a better person	Growing up
Sam, age 9: “My parents said the camping trip will be good for me and that I should go!”				
Kate, age 6: “I’m excited about starting school, I’m going to learn so many new things.”				
Eli, age 5: “we went to the lake for the first time I thought I would be scared to go in the water but I discovered that I really liked it!”				
Zaitlan, age 8: “Going to summer camp last year was my first time away from home – I really became more confident and independent.				
Ronnie, age 7: “We are going to visit our grandparents in Texas – I am really excited, I love spending time with them”				
David, age 9: “Once a week after school I go with my mum to the home where my grandparents live. I help them to go down to the dining room and sometimes I sing for them because they like that.				

Exercise: Leaving home

Where do you think they are going? What might be the purpose of their journey? What kind of journey (Lech L'cha) do you think they are on?



Leading Idea: Circles of attachment. (Bereshit 12:1)

When God tells Avram “Lech lecha” he mentions three kinds of leaving:

- Leave your country
- Leave your birthplace
- Leave your father’s house

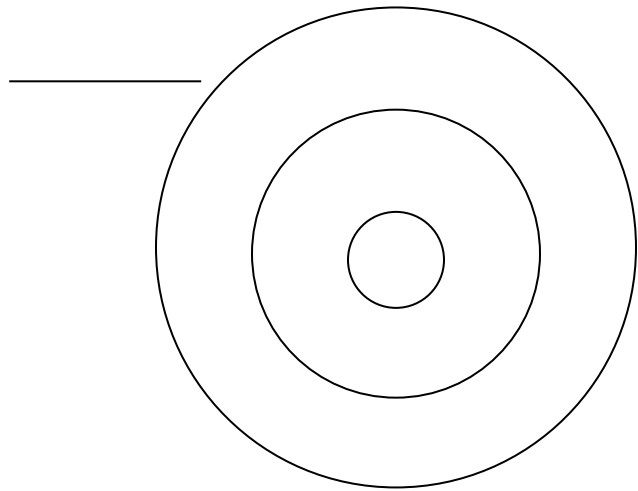
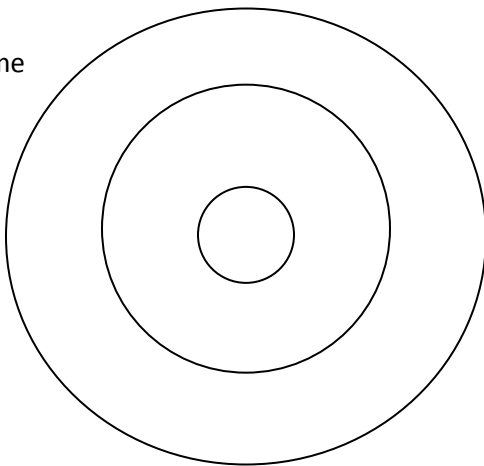
Several scholars have noted that it seems strange to list the circles of attachment in this order. The text from Nechama Leibowitz and the commentary *Haktav Vehakabala* both offer an interpretation for this.

This next set of exercises and discussion plan explore these different ‘layers of leaving’.

Exercise: Circles of Attachment

What in your life are you most attached to? Think of your home – if you were to leave home, what would be most difficult to leave behind? What not as difficult? Draw three circles. In the centre put the thing it would be most difficult to leave, then move out in the circles with things that would be less difficult to leave (from hardest to less hard). Pick a different community you are part of (school? sports team?) – what would be hardest to leave behind if you were leaving that community?

Home



Nehama Leibowitz: from Studies in Bereshit, pp.113

"לך-לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך"

"get thee out of thy country, and from thy birthplace, and from thy father's house..."

Commentators have remarked on the unusual order. The verse should have read, in the ordinary way: **"מבית אביך, ממולדתך ומארצך"** (from your father's house, your birthplace and from your country.") This is the logical sequence, since a person first leaves home, then his birthplace and then his fatherland

The commentary *הכתב והקבלה* (*Haktav Vehakabala*)* suggests that there we are referring to a spiritual rather than physical withdrawal, beginning with the periphery and ending with the inner core. The withdrawal from one's birthplace is not such a cruel wrench as the cutting of one's connection with one's family. First, therefore, Abraham was bidden to sever his connection with his country, then his city and finally the most intimate bond, that of home.

**Haktav Vehakabala: Was written by Rabbi Yaakov Tzevi Mecklenburg, a German Jewish scholar of the 19th century. Rabbi Mecklenburg served as Rabbi of Koenigsburg, East Prussia for 35 years (1831-65). Haketav Vehakabbalah was first published in 1839.*



Nehama Leibowitz -1905-1997, was a famous Israeli Bible scholar who developed a particular style of Bible study that was very popular around the world.

Picture; www.lookstein.org/nechama_biography.htm

Discussion Plan: Leavings

- 1) Do we all have to 'leave home' in order to grow up? Explain.
- 2) Abram took his brother and his cousins with him – so what was he really leaving behind?
- 3) If you go away but you still think about people a lot, and text them/e-mail them, have you left them behind?
- 4) If you go to school but hear your mother/father still speaking to you in your head–telling you what to do – have you left her/him behind?
- 5) If you go to school and carry a photo of your dog with you, have you left your dog behind?
- 6) Are you attached to places as well as people? Describe those places.
- 7) Is growing up a kind of journey?

Leading Idea: Blessings and Curses

In this passage, God makes three kinds of claims regarding how Avram will be blessed:

1. I will bless you
2. You shall be a blessing
3. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by/through you

What is a blessing? What does it mean 'to be blessed'? What might it mean to regard yourself blessed by the presence of someone else?

How might *giving or receiving a blessing* be different from *being a blessing*? Or *being blessed*? Whereas the activity of 'giving or receiving blessings' suggests a kind of transaction - with something being passed on from one person to another, the state of 'being a blessing' and 'being blessed' suggests some state of being – some inner active quality of a person. Here there is an interesting question - is 'blessing' being used transitively or intransitively? There is a difference between verbs used non-transitively (like "she is standing over there" OR "she is crying" and transitive verbs (like "Sam was hitting the pillow"). Whereas non-transitive verbs like standing and sitting don't have any direct object, you can only be 'hitting' if there is some object that directly receives your action (to hit you have to be hitting *something*).

A lot of verbs can be used both ways – and this seems to be the case with blessing. In this way 'being blessed' might grammatically be more like '*being kind*' than '*being happy*' - to say someone is being kind is to point to the way they interact with others and the world – it is doubtful you could be kind if you were totally alone on a desert island. (where there was no-one/nothing to be kind *toward*). While being happy is an inner state.

Another way of thinking about "being a blessing to others" might be the sort of thing that we might have in mind when we say of someone: "she is such a calm person, when she is here she has a calming influence on the whole room." (or spiritual person, or agitated person – the point being their state of being has an impact on their environment). We might also think of ways that we are blessed because of the presence of other people in our lives.

How might these meanings shed light on the text? What is avrams' jou

In addition to blessing Avram, God says he will bless all who bless Avram and curse all those who curse him. This not only suggests that people (as well as God) are capable of blessing and cursing – but opens up the moral question of what it means for God to act toward others according to how others treat Avram. What are we doing when we bless and curse people? Is it just another way of wishing them something (for instance, good or bad luck?). Can the idea of giving or receiving a blessing have significance even if you don't believe in 'a God who blesses or curses?

In Summary:

We might see being a blessing / being blessed as :

- An Inner Quality or state (non-transitive)
 - Could just be in you
 - Could also radiate out from you (like a person who is calm can make the room calm by their presence – the person impacts their environment)
- A quality you have that expresses itself outward to an object (like hitting – where you are hitting *something*)
 - Something you pass on to someone else through the act of blessing them
 - Through your interactions with others, their lives change in a substantial way (eg., they become a great nation.)

We might understand blessing as:

- Wishing or hoping
- Something only God can give or something people can also give, or both.
- the person being blessed is the one being changed, and/or the person giving the blessing is the one being changed.
- Having meaning only if you believe in God or having meaning even if you don't believe in God?

These are fine (and somewhat complex) distinctions, but getting the students to think about these is guided by different discussion plans – for example, the discussion plan on "giving and receiving blessings" explores transitivity in the concept of 'Blessing'.

Discussion Plan: Being Blessed

1. Can a person's life be blessed? If so, did it need someone to bless it? Explain,
2. Can a person be blessed with good health? If so, what does this mean?
3. Can we be a blessing to our parents? If so, what does this mean?
4. Can a day be blessed? Explain
5. Is there a difference between 'being blessed' and 'receiving a blessing'?

What is meant in each of these cases?

Does "Bless" mean the same thing in each case?

"Sam was blessed with children"

"Sam blessed his children"

"Sam's children thought they were blessed to have him as a father"

"Sam was blessed with kindness"

"Sam saw kindness as a blessing"

Sam said to his friend: "Being late to the party is a blessing in disguise"

Discussion Plan: Giving and receiving blessings

1. Can *anyone* receive a blessing?
2. Can *anyone* give a blessing?
3. Can you give a blessing without realizing you have done so?
4. Can you ask for a blessing? If so, what do you think happens when you are 'being blessed'?
5. Can you ask someone to give you a blessing?
6. Can you believe in blessings without believing in curses?
7. Can you believe in blessings without believing in God?
8. What blessing would you wish for?
9. What blessing would you like to give to someone else?

What is the meaning of “blessing”?

1. Can people give blessings, or only God? If people can give them, do you think there is a difference between *a blessing given by God* and *a blessing given by a person*? Explain.
2. Can you ‘give a blessing’ without *blessing someone /something*?
3. Is there a difference *being blessed* and *being a blessing*?
4. Could you ‘be a blessing’ if you had no effect on those around you?

In Verse 3 God says:

וְנִבְרַכְוּ בָךְ כָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה

**And all the families of the earth
shall find blessing through you.**

What do you think this means?

Activity:

*This is the way Cohenim hold their hands when giving the priestly blessing – the fingers form a Shin to represent Shaddai (God’s name.) Can you hold your hands this way? Look up the blessing **Bamidbar 6:23–27**.*

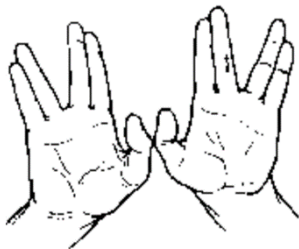


Image from: http://ggorelik.narod.ru/LeHaim_W/LeHaim_W1.htm



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Discussion Plan: Giving and Receiving Curses

1. Can you be cursed with bad health? If so, what does this mean?
2. Can a day be cursed? Explain
3. Can a person's life be cursed? If so, did it need someone to curse it? Explain,
6. Can we be a curse to our parents? If so, what does this mean?
7. Can you be a curse to your teachers? If so, what does this mean?
8. If I curse you by saying "May all your friends abandon you" is that the same as wishing that all your friends would abandon you?
9. Can people give curses or only God? If people can give them, do you think there is a difference between a curse given by God and a curse given by a person? Explain.
10. Can having someone curse you ever be a good thing?
11. Does giving a curse guarantee that the content of the curse will happen or come true?
12. Can you believe in blessings without believing in curses?
13. Can you believe in curses without believing in God?