

Candlelight time: 4:58 P.M. ... Sabbath Ends at 5:50

Scriptural reading for tomorrow morning:

LECH LECHA: Genesis 12:1-17-27

HAFTARAH 40:27-41:16

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: The phrase "lech-lecha," with which the first Divine call to Abram opens, is a vivid idiom, composed of two plain words. Separately they mean, lech, go, and lecha, to yourself. Joined, they express an emphatic, moving and penetrating summons, for a very special "going". Lech calls for the performance of the act; Lech-lecha calls for a total existential involvement in a great and crucial deed in which one's life, past and future is at stake and by which one asserts and finds himself. This utterance occurs only twice in the Scripture: here and in the Akeda story (Gen. 22:2). Both are addressed to the Patriarch, and both are linked with the Holy Land. First calling him to enter the Land; then, to arrive at its central spot of holiness, the Temple Mount at Moriah. From a Hassidic source: Lech-lecha indeed means go to yourself. "When you go up to the Holy Land, you return to the core of your being." (O'llot Efraim, Al Hatora, p. 38)

Compiled by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

LECH LECHA: Genesis 12:1-17:27
HAFTARAH: Isiah 40:27 — 41:16

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

ABRAHAM: The story of Abraham tells of the origins of the Jewish people and its bond with the Promised land. In the Torah, Abraham is not the founder of a new religion (Monotheism) nor does he smash idols (Iconoclasm). Indeed human history begins with man knowing the One and Only God. That our forefathers once worshipped "other gods" (Joshua 24:2) is not even mentioned in the Patriarchal narratives. Abraham is portrayed as progenitor of the People, a father-teacher bequeathing a legacy of righteousness and justice. (Gen. 18:19)

LEKH LEKHA: Genesis 12:1-17:27

HAFTARAH: Isaiah 40:27-41:16

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“Lech-lecha,” the first Divine call to Abraham, is a vivid idiom composed of two plain words. Separately they mean: Lech-- “go” and Lecha--” to yourself.” Combined, they express an emphatic, moving and penetrating summons for a very special “going.” “Lech” calls for the performance of an act; “Lech-lecha” calls for a total existential involvement in a great and crucial deed. It is a call to man to stake his very life, his past and future--asserting and finding himself--in response to the call. The phrase “Lech-lecha” occurs only twice in Scripture: here and in the Akeda story (Gen. 22:2). Both are addressed to the Patriarch, and both are linked with the Holy Land. The first one calls to enter the Land; the other, to arrive at its central spot of holiness, Moriah. “When you go up to the Holy Land, you “go to yourself,” you return to the core of your being.”(Hassidut).

LEKH-LEKHA: Genesis 12:1-17:27

HAFTARAH: Isaiah 40:27-41:16

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

JUDAISM'S ORIGINS are traced to the Patriarchs. The Torah is ascribed to Moses; but the people to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. A Jew is a "son of Israel" – referring to Jacob's Divinely-given name – not of Moses; a convert joins the "covenant of Abraham" – preceding Moses. The inception of Judaism, as an ever-growing spiritual and political reality, is Abraham's response to the Divine call (Gen. 12:1): "Lech-lecha" – "Go forth!" This is the creation, as well as the core, of the people, and its dynamic existence and drive: To be a great nation, a blessing for all, flourish in the Promised Land, and fulfill God's will by establishing a society of justice and righteousness. First they emerge as an historical people; then, imbued with the patriarchal heritage, they progress to Torah. Thus, at a later stage – after redemption from enslavement and before advancement to settlement – the people accepts the Torah. Only through identity with the people, its destiny and ideals, can a Jew fully express his Jewishness. Jewish "religion" can never be embraced, nor experienced, without Jewish peoplehood.

LEKH LEKHA: Genesis 12:1-17:27

HAFTARAH: Isaiah 40:27-41:16

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

JERUSALEM: The one and only mention of this city in the Pentateuch is by its shorter name Salem (Shalem) in the story of Abraham (then Abram) and Melchizedek (Malki-Zedek, "king of justice"), the city's king-priest (Gen. 14:18). Melchizedek welcomes Abram, who returns a victor from his military campaign, with bread and wine, and, as priest of El-Elyon ("God Most High"), he greets him with a blessing: "Blessed be Abram to El-Elyon, Possesser (or Maker) of heaven and earth; and blessed be El-Elyon, for handing over your foes to you." Abram then "gave him tith of everything." Melchizedek's gesture is an open and formal acknowledgement of the justness of Abram's war and the legality of his victory. Abram's gesture in return is also a symbolic indication of the future role of Jerusalem as the city of worship and priesthood. Both the names of the city and its ruler are indicative: Salem means peace and completeness; Zedek, justice and rightness. In the future, envisions Isaiah (1:26), the city will be called — echoing the name of its ancient king — "Ir-ha-zedek," the city of righteousness.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE LAND OF ISRAEL is the theme of the first Divine call to the father of the Jewish people (Gen. 12:1): "Go forth...to the land that I will show you." In this call, neither the identity nor the location of the new land are disclosed: God "will show." Proceeding toward the unknown, Abraham follows not a specific piece of geography, but heeds the summons of Divine designation and promise. Adhering to the word of God, Abraham goes forth to a land of future. This land is to remain forever, for the Jewish people throughout the ages, the land of promise – a destination, not a memory. For Jews, this land has always been the core of history and destiny neither a fatherland nor a mother country, neither a tomb for bygone glories nor a shrine for sentimental fancies, neither a monument for mythological legends nor a site for archeological diggings, neither a symbol of celebrated dogma nor a relic from a fossilized past, but a compelling presence, a vital reality pregnant with promise and messianic-expectation – a vision of a future. This land is still the land that God "will show." The bond between the people and the land, inspired as it is by the past, is in essence fastened with Divine promise and anchored in the future. This is eternally the land toward which the finger of God is pointing and the heart of the Jew pounding.

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, Nov. 6:
LECH LECHA: Genesis 12:1-17:27
HAFTARAH: Isaiah 40:27-41:16

LECH-LECHA: Genesis 12:1-17:27

HAFTARAH: Isaiah 40:27-41:16

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE LAND OF ISRAEL (Eretz Yisrael) – called “Canaan” in antiquity (until the end of the 13th century B.C.E.) and “Palestine” recently (until May, 1948) – is the one and only land promised to, and cherished by, the people of Israel since the dawn of its history. Encamped near Beth-El on the hills of Judea (north of Jerusalem). Abraham, father of the people, was told by God (Genesis 13:14-17): “Lift up your eyes and gaze around, from where you are, to the north and south, east and west; for all the land that you see, to you I will give, to your descendants forever. . . . Stand up, move forth across the land, through its length and breadth, for to you I will give it!” This Divine promise has constantly sustained Judaism throughout the ages, reassuring that the link between the people of Israel and the land of Israel (call it “Canaan” or “Palestine” or whatever) is forever firm and irrevocable. This is our land of promise for eternity.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

ABRAHAM is considered the father of Judaism. The history of Judaism begins neither with Joshua, the conquerer of the Land, nor with Moses, the liberator of the people, but with the first patriarch. The starting point of Judaism is neither territorial conquest nor the founding of a new religion. The Torah is called by the name of Moses--*Torat Moshe*--, but the people trace their genesis to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The history of the Jewish people opens with a call to "go forth" (*lekh-lekha*)--with a vision:

*I will make of you a great people,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
so that you will become a blessing.*

The spirit of Abraham, with his call "lekh-lekha," continues to direct the journey of Judaism throughout history.

LEKH LEKHA

October 26, 1990

ABRAHAM is depicted in Torah as father of a newly arising people in the promised land, not as first monotheist or founder of a new religion; he is a patriarch who molds his children's destiny, not an iconoclast who smashes his father's idols. Joshua's allegation (24:2) that Abraham's forefathers worshipped "other gods" is not reflected in Torah. Nor is Abraham ever told to reject his parents' culture. Abraham and his children continue to cherish their old family roots and keep marital ties with their old relatives living afar, rather than with their new neighbors. In Torah's view human history starts with all knowing One God; thus Adam is the first monotheist. Abraham is neither an iconoclast nor founder of a new religion; he is the genealogical and spiritual father of the Jewish people.

LEKH LEKHA

October 18, 1991

"LEKH-LEKHA!" ("GO FORTH!"), the starting phrase of the first divine call to Abraham, literally means "Go to yourself!" (Gen. 12:1). The patriarch is instructed to relocate -- to depart from his ethnic bedrock, advance towards an unknown destination and a dawning destiny. A triadic departure: From his (1) land, (2) clan, and (3) father's home. The order is psychological, reflecting successive levels of emotional attachments, to (1) environment, (2) society, and (3) nucleus family. Abraham must first sever his territorial ties, then his kinship roots, and finally, his strongest bond -- "father's home."

The inner core and final goal of the divine call, however, is "going to oneself" (*Lekh-lekha!*). This "fourth" level is the quintessence of Abraham's heroic move, comprising both its inception and culmination. Namely: finding, expressing, actualizing and refining one's own uniqueness. Going to the Holy Land is indeed "going to oneself!" (R. Efraim of Luntshits, 1550-1619; *Keli Yakar*).

LECH-LECHA: Genesis 12:1-17:27
HAFTARAH: Isaiah 40:27-41:16

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“LECH LECHA” — depart and go forth. With this divine call to Abraham, Judaism emerged. Since then, Judaism displays this original genius of departure and going forth by constant protest and progress. Inbued with this ancient spirit of “lech lecha” — of breaking away from and moving ahead — the Jew throughout the ages rejects tyranny, fights iniquity and strives to improve this world and make it a better place for humanity.

Friday, November 10, 1978 THE CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda-

HAGAR, SARAH'S EGYPTIAN MAIDSERVANT, was harshly treated by her mistress. First she was given by her then-barren mistress to her master Abraham to become his bedmate and bear for them a child. Abraham obliged and she became pregnant. Sarah then disdained her maidservant and taunted her husband (Gen. 16:5): "My outrage be upon you! It was I who put my maidservant into your embrace; but now that she sees she is pregnant, I am worthless in her eyes. The Lord judge between you and me!" Submissive towards his wife, but ungallant and inconsiderate towards his pregnant bedmate, Abraham waived his right and duty to protect the poor slave girl, telling his wife: "Here is your maid in your power; do to her as you please." Sarah then abused her so much that Hagar ran away from her to the desert. Sarah in torturing Hagar, and Abraham in allowing her to do so, acted wrongly (Nahmanides). The name of her son Ishmael (God hears) bears divine compassion: God has heard the voice of Hagar's anguish.

Candlelight time: 5:02 Sabbath ends 5:54

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, Nov. 3:

LECH-LECHA: Genesis 12:1-17:27

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

ABRAHAM, father of the Jewish people, like all great heroes of Judaism, is not superhuman but fully human. Born and raised in the rich and pagan culture of ancient Babylon, Abraham, deeply moved by the Divine call “Lech Lecha!” (“Go Forth!”), leaves his native land and ancestral heritage, and sets new roots in a new land, the Promised Land. His mighty vision and purpose is to establish a new and great nation, adhering to the One God and living by His rules of righteousness and justice. Abraham’s way, like that of his descendants, is fraught with harsh struggles and taxing ordeals, but he copes with them with human persistence, determination and faith. His legacy is a source of inspiration for us: By the same Divine call to Abraham we too are urged to “go forth”—to advance and progress toward our envisioned destiny.

Candlelight time 6:25 Sabbath ends 7:16

**Scriptural reading for Saturday, Oct. 18:
LECH-LECHA: Genesis 12:1-17:27**

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS (Emuna and Tzedaka), two prominent Jewish virtues, are linked together in one verse dealing with Abraham and his relationship with God (Genesis 15:8): "He had faith in God; and He (God) counted it to him (Abraham) as righteousness." This translation reflects Rashi's opinion: God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness, for He considers human faith in Him as a special expression of human kindness and propriety. Faith in God is not taken for granted; it is cherished by God. Disagreeing with Rashi, Nahmanides offers a different interpretation: "and he (Abraham) counted it to Him (God) as righteousness." Abraham considered the Divine promise to him, that his descendants will become a mighty nation, as a special expression of divine compassion and justice. Accordingly, the faith mentioned in this verse is Abraham's; the righteousness is God's. Not only did Abraham display faith in trusting God's promise, but also gratitude in appreciating this promise as manifesting Divine Tzedaka.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

JUDAISM'S ORIGINS are traced to the Patriarchs. The Torah is ascribed to Moses; but the people to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. A Jew is a "son of Israel" – referring to Jacob's Divinely-given name – not of Moses; a convert joins the "covenant of Abraham" – preceding Moses. The inception of Judaism, as an ever-growing spiritual and political reality, is Abraham's response to the Divine call (Gen. 12:1): "Lech-lecha" – "Go forth!" This is the creation, as well as the core, of the people, and its dynamic existence and drive: To be a great nation, a blessing for all, flourish in the Promised Land, and fulfill God's will by establishing a society of justice and righteousness. First they emerge as an historical people; then, imbued with the patriarchal heritage, they progress to Torah. Thus, at a later stage – after redemption from enslavement and before advancement to settlement – the people accepts the Torah. Only through identity with the people, its destiny and ideals, can a Jew fully express his Jewishness. Jewish "religion" can never be embraced, nor experienced, without Jewish peoplehood.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

EMUNA (faith) is illustrated by Abraham. After he heroically rescued his nephew Lot from captivity, God reassured him (Genesis 15:1): "Fear not, Abram! I am your Shield! Your reward is very great!" The aging and barren patriarch retorted: "O Lord God, what can You give me, since I keep on being childless? . . ." God, then, promised him that his descendants will be numerous as the stars. The patriarch, as Torah attests (6), "believed in God . . ." The verb *ve-he-e-min* means that he "had always believed" in God, even before the promise, and even while he was questioning God. His faith was not a consequence of God's promise, but the backbone of his entire relationship with God. True faith, like true love, does not depend on any promise. It leads to promise.

Friday, October 25, 1985 CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

FINDING ONE'S SELF is the essence of *lekh-lekha* (Gen. 12:1; "go forth!"). Literally "go to yourself!" the phrase opens the first divine call to our Patriarch Abraham, urging him to relocate, leave his past and advance towards his future, in a departure of three stages: "Go forth from your (1) land, (2) tribe, and (3) father's home."

The order is psychological, in line of emotional detachment: geographic, social, filial. A person first severs his territorial ties, then his kinship roots, and finally his strongest bond to "father's home." The higher ("fourth") stage, however, is finding one's self expressing, actualizing and refining one's unique personality. Hence: "*Lekh-Lekha!*" – "Go to yourself!" (*Keli Yakar*).

Friday, November 14, 1986 CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

ABRAHAM THE HEBREW (Gen. 14:13). The title “the Hebrew” (*ha-Ivri*) indicates, in context, the Patriarch’s ethnic or geographic origin: Ethnically he was a descendant of Ever (grandson of Shem, one of the three sons of Noah): geographically he came from Mesopotamia, the land between the lower Tigris and Euphrates rivers (now in modern Iraq) -- from across (“*me-ever*”) the land of the Two Rivers (“*Naharaim*”). In biblical literature the title Hebrew is used as synonym for Israelite, mostly in conversations with, or in contrast to, non-Jews.

Midrashically, the term “Hebrew” is viewed as signifying uniqueness and separateness; “*ever*” means on the other side: The whole world is on one side and Abraham and his people on the other -- in faith and in destiny.

Friday, October 30, 1987 CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

“LEKH—LEKHA!” (“Go forth!”) is an intriguing phrase, appearing only twice in the Hebrew Bible; both in the life experience of Patriarch Abraham; each in a divine call to him: (1) In the Migration story (Gen. 12:1), calling the patriarch to leave his native land (Ur of the Chaldeans, near the Euphrates at the Persian Gulf), and advance to the promised land (Canaan, later the land of Israel); (2) In the *Akeda* story (22:2), calling him to sacrifice (or “elevate”) his son Isaac. The first call involved departure of the devotee from his father, his past; the second, from his son, his future. The first canceled his pagan past; the second confirmed his promised future.

Both calls use the phrase “*lekh lekha*”—literally: Go to yourself; and by yourself. In both, the devotee seeks and finds his true self -- his genuine roots and unique destiny.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / NOVEMBER 17, 2000

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

HOSPITALITY (*haknasat-orehim*) is the hallmark of patriarch Abraham. Literally meaning “bringing in and welcoming guests,” the Hebrew phrase points to the essence of Jewish hospitality as epitomized by the patriarch. His heart and home were wide open for guests and wayfarers. He personally attended to their needs. His hospitality was unconditional. It was not used as bait or an instrument for seducing or converting his beneficiaries to his faith. Before the meal, he did not ask his guests to recite any benediction to his God. And after the

meal was over, he neither expected nor requested any ritual or religious payoff.

Abraham’s hospitality did not stem from missionary zeal, but from his genuine love and care for his fellow human being. It was not based on contrivance but on compassion. This is true biblical *hesed* (loving-kindness), which is in the very core of Judaism. It has always been modeled after Abraham’s hospitality.

See Torah on page 47.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

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RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

ABRAHAM IS DEPICTED in Torah as the Divinely inspired father of a newly arising people in the Promised Land, not as the first monotheist or the founder of a new religion. He is a patriarch who molds his children's destiny, not an iconoclast who smashes his father's idols. Joshua's allegation (24:2) that Abraham's ancestors in Mesopotamia worshipped *elohim aherim* (other gods) is not stated in Torah. Also, Abraham is never told to totally reject his parents' culture. He

and his children continue to cherish their old family roots and endeavor to keep ties with their old relatives outside the land, rather than with the new, native neighbors.

In Torah's view, human history starts with all knowing One God; Adam is the first monotheist. Abraham – neither iconoclast nor founder of a new religion – is the genealogical and spiritual father of the Jewish people. Moses, by whom we received the Torah, is *rabbenu* (our teacher); Abraham is *avinu* (our father).

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

JERUSALEM: The one and only mention of this city in Torah is in this Shabbat's reading (Genesis 14:18), in the story of Abra(ha)m's solemn encounter with the city's king-priest *Malki-Zedek* (Melchizedek). The city is called by its shorter name, *Shalem* (Salem).

Abraham, who returns a victor from his military campaign after rescuing Lot, is regally welcomed by Melchizedek with the traditional ceremonial offering of bread and wine. As priest of *El-Elyon* ("God Most High"), Melchizedek greets the illustrious victor with this blessing::

*Blessed be Abraham to El-Elyon,
Maker/Possessor of heaven and earth.
And blessed be El-Elyon,
For handing over your foes to you.*

Seemingly speaking as a monotheist, Melchizedek calls his God El-Elyon, perceiving Him as "Maker/Possessor" of the entire universe. The Hebrew participle *Koneh* may mean both "Creator" and "Owner" as this term, addressed to the One God, is understood in Jewish liturgy. Graciously respectful of the king's faith and ministry, Abraham then "gave him tithe of everything." Melchizedek's friendly gesture was an open acknowledgment of the justness of Abraham's war and the legality of his victory. Abraham's grateful act in return may be seen also as symbolic of the future role of Jerusalem as the city of kingship, priesthood, peace and worship.

Both names, of the city and of its ancient ruler, are indicative: *Shalem* means peace and completeness; *Zedek*, justice and rightness. Isaiah (1:26) envisions that the new name of Jerusalem in the future will be "The City of Righteousness" (*Zedek*), echoing the name of its ancient king and presaging its destined role.

LEKH-LEKHA

Thought One

"LEKH-LEKHA!" -- AN EXISTENTIAL CALL: This phrase, with which the first Divine call to Abram opens, is a vivid idiom composed of two plain Hebrew words: lekh -- an imperative meaning "Go!" -- and lekha -- a preposition meaning "to yourself." Joined together they become an emphatic, moving and penetrating summons. A call for a very special "going," directed to a very special person, "yourself." The imperative "lekh" by itself simply calls for a performance of an act, of "going." With the added "lekha" it becomes a call for a total existential involvement in a sublime and crucial deed. A call to a person to stake his very life, his entire existence, his past and future, and "go forth" towards a transcendent, mysterious, destination -- and thereby, paradoxically, express and find himself.

Only twice in all Scriptures does this phrase "lekh-lekha" appear, both addressed to the Patriarch: At the beginning of his way (Genesis 12:1), and at the peak of his trials, the Akeda (22:2). The first is a call to sacrifice his past, to sever himself from his roots, to leave behind his father's home; the second, to sacrifice his future, to give up his posterity, to bring up as ola his son's life. Both lekh-lekha are linked with the Holy Land: The first calling him to reach it, and the second to arrive at its focal spot of holiness -- Mount Moriah.

Literally, "lekh-lekha!" means "Go to yourself!" There are decisive moves in your life in which when you "go forth" you truly "go to yourself" -- you reach and get in touch with the very core of your being.

LEKH-LEKHA

Thought Two

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM tells of the origins of the Jewish people and its bond with the Promised Land.

In Torah's account Abraham emerges not as the first Monotheist, who founds a new religion, nor as the legendary Iconoclast, who literally smashes his father's idols. In fact, human history, in Torah's perspective, begins with all humankind knowing the One and only God. The popular tradition that in antiquity Abraham's forefathers did worship "other gods" (Joshua 24;2) is not even indicated at all in the patriarchal narratives of Torah. Abraham's task and roll in starting a new family in a new place is not linked at all in Torah's presentation with the religious or moral corruption of his own family roots. Quite the opposite, even while in their new land, Abraham and his descendants, by divine order, endeavor to maintain marital ties with their close relatives outside the land rather than with their indigenous neighbors within the land.

Abraham is primarily portrayed as progenitor of the people and inheritor of the land. An individual who follows God's call and merits His dual promises: The promise of People and the promise of Land. He thus becomes the Patriarch -- a father-teacher who bequeathes to his children and followers a divine legacy of righteousness and justice (Genesis 18;19).

LEKH-LEKHA

Thought Three

JUDAISM'S ORIGINS are traced in Torah to the Patriarchs. The Torah is ascribed to Moses, but the people to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. A Jew is called ben or bat (son or daughter) of Yisrael (Israel), not of Moshe (Moses); Israel being the divinely given name of Jacob, the last of the three Patriarchs. A ger, a proselyte to Judaism, joins the berit (covenant) of Abraham -- preceding Moses.

From the point of view of Torah, the inception of Judaism, as an ever-growing spiritual and political reality, is Abraham's response to the divine call (Genesis 12:1), "Lech-lekha!" -- "Go forth!" This is the beginning as well as the core of the Jewish people, its mysterious creation, wonderous existence, and dynamic drive: "Go forth!" -- to be a great nation, a blessing for all, flourishing in the promised land, and fulfilling God's will, by establishing a society of justice and righteousness. Imbued with the patriarchal heritage, the Israelites first emerge as an historical entity, a pre-Toraic people. Only at a later stage in Israel's history, after the Exodus -- after their redemption from enslavement, and before entering the Promised Land -- was Torah revealed to and accepted by the people.

Judaism is not merely a "religion" of believers sharing the same doctrine and ritual; it is basically a national entity of people sharing the same roots, the same destiny, and the same Torah. Only through identity with the Jewish people -- its history and ideals -- can one fully experience and express one's Jewishness. This is also true for joining Judaism from the outside: Jewish "religion" can not be embraced, legally or socially, without joining Jewish peoplhood. Symbolically, therefore, Judaism traces its origins not to Moses, the Teacher of Torah, but to Abraham, the Father of the people.

LEKH-LEKHA

Thought Four

EMUNA AND TZEDAKA -- FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS -- two prominent Jewish virtues, are linked together in one verse which deals with Abraham and his relationship with God (Genesis 15:8): "He [Abraham] had faith in God; and He [God] counted it [this human faith] to him [to Abraham] as righteousness."

This rendition of the verse reflects Rashi's way: God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness; for He considers human faith in Him as a special manifestation of human nobility and sensibility -- an attitude expressing kindness and justness, both of which are entailed in the Hebrew term tzedaka.

According to Rashi's interpretation, human faith in God is not taken by Him for granted. This faith is appreciated, so to say, by God and cherished by Him. Both the emuna (faith) and tzedaka (righteousness) mentioned in this verse are virtues of Abraham.

Nahmanides, however, offers a different rendition of the concluding phrase of the verse: "...and he [Abraham] counted it [the Divine promise] to Him [to God] as righteousness." So, Abraham, having faith in God, considered His promise to him, that his descendants will become a mighty nation, as a special expression of Divine compassion and justice. Accordingly, the faith mentioned in this verse is Abraham's; the righteousness is God's. Not only did Abraham display emuna in trusting God's promise, but also gratitude and appreciation, recognizing that this Divine promise expresses the Divine attribute of tzedaka.

LEKH-LEKHA

Thought Seven

JERUSALEM: The one and only mention of this city in Torah is by its shorter name Shalem (Salem). It appears in the story of Abraham (then Abram) and Malki-Zedek (Melchizedek, "King of Justice"), the king-priest of the city (Genesis 14:18).

Abraham, who returns a victor from his military campaign after rescuing Lot, is regally welcomed by Melchizedek with the traditional ceremony of offering him bread and wine. As priest of El-Elyon ("The God Most High"), he greets the illustrious victor with the following blessing:

Blessed be Abram to El-Elyon,
Possessor of heaven and earth.
And blessed be El-Elyon,
For handing over your foes to you.

El-Elyon, Melchizedek's God, is perceived by him as "Possessor" ("koneh") of the entire universe. The Hebrew participle koneh may also mean "Maker" as this term is understood in Judaism with regard to the One God. Graciously tolerant and respectful to the king's faith, Abraham then "gave him tith of everything." Melchizedek's friendly gesture was an open and formal acknowledgement of the justness of Abraham's war and the legality of his victory. Abraham's grateful act in return, giving tith to the king-priest of the city, may be seen also as a symbolic indication of the future role of Jerusalem -- as the city of peace, kingship, priesthood, and worship.

Both names, of the city and of its ancient ruler, are indicative: Shalem means peace and completeness; Zedek, justice and rightness. Isaiah (1:26) envisions that in the future this city will be called by a new name, echoing the name of its ancient king -- Ir-Ha-Zedek, The City of Righteousness.

LEKH LEKHA

October 14, 1994

LEKH-LEKHA! ("GO FORTH!"), the starting phrase of the first divine call to Abraham, literally means "Go to yourself!" (Genesis 12:1). The patriarch is instructed to relocate -- to depart from his ethnic bedrock, advance towards an unknown destination and a dawning destiny. A triadic departure: From his (1) land, (2) clan, and (3) father's home. The order is psychological, reflecting successive levels of emotional attachments, to (1) environment, (2) society, and (3) nucleus family. Abraham must first sever his territorial ties, then his kinship roots, and finally, his strongest bond -- "father's home."

The inner core and final goal of the divine call, however, is "going to oneself" (*Lekh-lekha!*). This "fourth" level is the quintessence of Abraham's heroic move, comprising both its inception and culmination. Namely: finding, expressing, actualizing and refining one's own uniqueness. Going to the Holy Land is indeed "going to oneself!" (R. Efraim of Luntshits, 1550-1619; *Keli Yakar*).