

We do not begin Abraham's story with his birth or childhood. We begin with the beginning of his adult life, or at least the beginning of what he sees as his real adult life, when he follows a call to leave his parents home and his homeland to follow a vision.

The first words God says to Avram, Lech Lecha, are usually translated as "Go forth". It means going on a journey, and it's a kind of mission statement for what it means to be Jewish. It means not being stuck in the past. It means living what it means to be Jewish right now. It's not about fitting in, it's about moving on. We don't know exactly where we're headed, but we always need to take this journey into the unknown. God says to Avram: "Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed". That's the point of being Jewish – to become a vehicle through which all of the earth's families will be blessed. Our goal as a Jewish people is to bring blessings to the entire world by embodying compassion by which I mean engaging with the world in justice, love and humility. About two thousand years ago someone asked the great sage Rabbi Hillel to sum up the Torah while standing on one foot. So he stood on one foot and he said: What is hateful to you do not do to another. This is the whole of the Torah, all the rest is commentary.

All of Judaism is a guide to compassion – if it's not making you a more just and loving person, then you're just not doing it right.

There's something else in the Hebrew phrase Lech Lecha. It means "Go" but so does Lech. Why say Lech Lecha, rather than just lech? The Lecha of lech lecha means to yourself, so literally Lech Lecha means "go to yourself". Abraham is told to leave, in this order, his land, his family and his father's house, to go to the land that God will show him. Of course if his journey was just a physical one, he'd have to leave his father's house first, and eventually his land once he'd reached the borders. But like the journey through adolescence into adulthood, Abraham's journey is also an emotional and spiritual journey. If we want to discover our true selves, we have to leave some external influences behind first. You need to learn to discover your own inner voice and to trust it. Abraham's journey is not an easy one – he faces famine, war and infertility before he can truly settle down. Abraham doesn't know his destination and we never know exactly where we're heading in life either. It's a journey based on trust and it's a destination to a whole new mindset.

Avram struggles with trust, with believing that it's all going to be OK. He complains to God, that he still has not children, so how does he know that any of God's promises are going to come true. In a strange vision, God tells Avram that his descendants

will be slaves in Egypt for 400 years but that after that they will be given this land to inherit. In other words – sometimes things get worse before they get better, you just have to hang on and hang in there, because it will come right in the end.

We never know where life is going to take us. We are all, at some level, travelling into the unknown. But the good news, is that you are a part of a people and culture that know how to walk this path. At its best, Judaism challenges you to leave what you have known and step into the unknown, to be a vehicle for blessing that so that everyone benefits from you being on this planet, and to embody a level of awareness that embraces the world with justice, love and humility.

It's quite an inheritance. But I promise you, it's worth the trip.