

Lekh Lekha "Go for yourself"

Genesis 12:1-17:27

Your Three Alibis

Abram and Sarai had three legitimate alibis. So do we. What is an alibi? It's a good reason for not being responsible, an excuse.

Abram and Sarai lived in Ur, the heart of the Fertile Crescent on the other side of the Euphrates. It was the pinnacle of civilization, offering a system of laws, art, writing, medicine, abundant food, and unfortunately...abundant gods. Except for the last thing, it was a great place to build a family, build a sheep business, and live in relative safety.

In spite of all these advantages, Abram and Sarai pack up the family and the sheep and "Lekh Lekha" to a place they've never seen. A place infested with Canaanites, Sodomites, and giants. Surely they had an alibi not to go. Why go from one pagan-worshipping location to another?

The commandment to *Lekh Lekha* can be simplified to three steps:

Go, Grow, and Bestow

Now the LORD said to Abram ,

1. ' Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you;
2. and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great ;
3. and so you shall be a blessing ; and I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' (Ge 12:1-3)

Abram was called an *ivri*, or Hebrew, one who passes over. Abram and Sarai didn't pass over just one river, the Euphrates. Their obedient life of going, growing, and bestowing was characterized by a series of crossings between the Euphrates and Nile Rivers, including the Jordan. There is something to learn from our father and mother in faith.

First, **go**.

As you go, **grow**.

As you grow, **bestow** blessings on others.

Lekh lekha means "go for yourself." "Yourself" means for personal benefit. Not every action or move is beneficial, and not every action is pleasurable. For instance, I hate brussels sprouts. Brussels sprouts are beneficial, but not pleasurable. Crank-n-Boom Ice Cream is pleasurable. Going for one's self is to find that the commandments are both beneficial, life-giving, and pleasurable, full of joy and peace. It's kind of like biting into a Brussels sprout and it tastes like Blueberry Lime Cheesecake Crank-n-Boom.

The Holy One urged Abram and Sarai to go to Israel for life-giving benefit as well as personal pleasure. We may derive two lessons from their obedience:

1. Going to Israel is both beneficial AND pleasurable.
2. Obeying a commandment can be both beneficial and pleasurable.

How would they have known that they had grown unless they had gone?

Of course, had Abram and Sarai wondered every day of the journey whether it was worth it, the answer would have been uncertain. Adventure by adventure, the faithful couple may have felt no more blessed than anyone else, or even worse off. They never quite fit in, never quite felt safe, never felt like they had found the perfect congregation. In fact, they had to "make souls" in Haran to continue the obedient journey with them.

Abram and Sarai may have second-guessed the going in the growing, but they kept bestowing blessings on others. Only in hindsight can we see how we've grown in the journey of multiple crossings in commandments and in making pilgrimage to the Land of Israel. It is easy to stall out while we're waiting for a particular commandment to grow on us and start tasting like Honey Bourbon Crank-n-Boom.

The Three Alibis

The fact that Abram and Sarai left Ur at all is an incredible step of faith that is under-appreciated by modern believers and readers. Journeying was a life-threatening act. Abram and Sarai could have presented three very legitimate ancient "alibis" for not making the pilgrimage journey to Israel:

- * Diminished reproduction
- * Diminished money
- * Diminished name

It was believed that travel diminished reproduction, for either one left his family at home, or if his spouse traveled with him, the hardship of the journey diminished marital relations, fertility, or was too difficult for the newborn or young children, an alibi that Jacob later offered to Esau, who accepted it, for it was quite valid. Of course, Jacob used the alibi to stay IN the Land. People could become ill and die from the harsh elements. Journeying could kill you! Flash floods still claim lives in Israel, and in ancient times, establishing and nurturing offspring was vital.

The second ancient alibi is that a journey required great financial investment. One's goods could be robbed by bandits, taxed heavily at territorial borders, or damaged in transit. It would have been slow going to keep sheep and goats well-fed and watered. The photos below display the ancient caravan crossing of Scorpion's Ascent in the Aravah along with a Roman tax-collection house that was likely built on an even more ancient Customs chokepoint to the merchant road across the mountains. In fact, tradition suggests that it was at a tax collection point into Egypt that Sarai came to Pharaoh's officials' attention. Journeying to Israel definitely reduces one's coin. If you don't believe it, book a flight to Tel Aviv and see how much of the ticket cost is taxes and fees.



Akravah, or Scorpion's Ascent, an ancient merchant trade route in the Aravah



Tax collection building along Scorpion's Ascent

The last alibi was that a journey reduced one's influence in the world by requiring him to rebuild his reputation and financial stability in a new location, or his influence in his hometown would suffer in his absence. Take too much time off of work, and someone climbing the ladder will take your place. Go to a new place, and you'll have to establish yourself all over again as an honest person, reliable person, Godly person. You might lose leadership privileges or reduced wages. In ancient times, establishing one's good reputation and his "house" was a legitimate alibi.

These three ancient alibis are still in use. One may offer one or more of these alibis either for not obeying the commandments or for not making a pilgrimage to Israel. Believers today still complain about the giants of Canaanites, Sodomites, and other imperfections in the Land of Israel. Abram and Sarai didn't wait for Messiah to "carry me home," so why should we? Even one journey to Israel for a feast is a proclamation of faith that for every alibi, there is an assurance and a blessing. We will **go, grow, and bestow**.

If going to Israel is truly impossible, then what prevents us from learning and obeying the commandments while we wait for the coins to grow? That is a step anyone can take anywhere, anytime, anyplace. Although like Abram and Sarai, we will encounter crossings in the commandments that are difficult Brussels sprouts, in time they will taste Kentucky Blackberry Buttermilk or SuperFudge. Those commandments are so that we can walk for ourselves into spiritual growth and in turn bless others.

That is what distinguished Abram and Sarai. Up until their Lekh Lekha blessing, certain righteous men in Scripture received a blessing from Adonai, but Abram and Sarai received the blessings AS WELL AS the ability to activate blessings (or curses) on other people:

...so you shall be a blessing ; and I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Whether we go to Israel on a pilgrimage journey or whether we simply say yes to a commandment because Yeshua and the Father said so, we are Abraham and Sarah's children. We go because we will grow, and then we will bestow those

blessings and help The Holy One of Israel influence more souls obedient to the Covenant.

The blessings address all three of Abram's legitimate concerns:

- * Reproduction, or an heir by fathering a great nation
- * Financial resources, for "blessing" frequently connotes money
- * I will make your name great, one that will be respected by other nations, not just the local yokels, so much so that they will be cursed or blessed according to their relationship with you

The three ancient alibis are legitimate concerns in the physical realm of existence. Faith, though, puts more weight on the spiritual rewards of physical sacrifice. We can birth children into the Kingdom and "make souls" like Abraham and Sarah. We change our perception of what constitutes wealth, and the more we invest in the Kingdom, the wealthier we are, even though we're still driving older model cars and there's always \$20,000 worth of repairs that need to be done to the house. The less we care about climbing social and business ladders, the more access we have to Jacob's ladder, where Abram and Sarai pitched their tents in Lekh Lekha. The Brussels sprouts mitzvot of the journey begin to taste like Coffee Stout and Salted Caramel.

So which alibi will we offer for not making a journey to Israel or keeping His Word? Will it be too hard on our children or spouse? Does it cost too much money? Will we sacrifice our standing in our social, family, or business circles? And which one of those alibis has the Father not guaranteed to address if we will go, grow, and bestow?

Even the plain Vanilla commandments are delicious.

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