

Shabbat Parashat Lekh L'kha
Taking Pause to "Smell the Roses"

In this week's *parasha*, God initiates the covenant with Avram, Sarai (their names have not yet been changed to Abraham and Sarah) and their descendents. God instructs Avram to leave his homeland and to set out on a journey to a land that God would later show him. Without asking even one question, Avram packs up his family, his belongings, rounds up his herds, and sets out for this new home. Upon arrival, God speaks to Avram, telling him to look out upon his new homeland in all four directions, to venture into it and to walk its full length and breadth. Ancient civil law required an individual to perform a physical act in order to take possession of an object (such as taking an item in your hand and lifting it up). Therefore, God is asking Avram to take possession of the land by walking through it. However, there is more to this directive from God than a simple "business transaction." God is teaching Avram, and all of us, a lesson about how we should perceive and interact with what is ours.

Avram had already shown that he had a tremendous amount of faith and trust in God. God could have very easily shown Avram the land he was about to inherit and tell him where to go to set up his camp. However, God tells Avram to take pause, to take a moment to be able to survey the landscape of his new home, to look into it, quite literally, from top to bottom and from side to side. Avram is to go and walk around in his new land, to get a feel for what it has to offer. God wants Avram not just to have "paper ownership" of his land, but really to know it, to appreciate it and the gifts that God has provided within it, and to recognize that it is a symbol of his relationship with God.

How often do we take pause to appreciate what we have in the same way that God instructed Avram? In a way, God asks Avram to see the land in the same way as someone is supposed to look at a piece of art. You cannot really appreciate a work of art without taking pause really to SEE it. We must learn to stop, really see what it is that we have, be grateful for it, and reflect upon it before we hurry back to our dizzying schedules and pursuits for "more." If we took the time that God suggests, then maybe we would not feel such a drive for "more" and have a sense of contentment and satisfaction with our current states. That is not to say that we should not always seek to improve ourselves or to make better lives for our families, but taking pause allows us to see what we have and to understand what we "need" in contrast to what we merely "want."

Erev Shabbat/Friday night, with its time dedicated to rest, to family, and to taking a break, is a wonderful opportunity to try on "taking pause" and seeing how we can make it fit. We can ask about the accomplishments of our children from the previous week. We can reflect upon our own accomplishments at work. Take time to appreciate a long Shabbat dinner together as a family and, perhaps, plan ways that the family can spend more time together appreciating each other's company and the blessings we have been given. We, too, would then be fulfilling God's instruction to "survey our landscapes and walk through our homelands" with our heads up, our hearts open, and our spirits grateful.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Matthew Bellas