

“Two Kinds of Journey”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Lech L'cha, God's first command to Abraham, means “go forth.” Many commentators understand it as also meaning, “go to yourself”: God is initiating a journey of inner exploration for Abraham. But the image of a journey is peculiar; we have to journey to another place, but surely we begin with ourselves, and do we need not travel to get to us?

Rabbi Arthur Green points out that the Torah uses both metaphors of faith: the “going up” metaphor of mountain and sky, and the “going in” metaphor of heart and soul. Journeying is natural to the first: Moses must climb the mountain, Elijah must ascend in a heavenly chariot. But discovering oneself shares the characteristics of a journey as well: there are familiar sites, unexpected places, disagreeable surprises, footholds for rest and beckoning peaks.

“I love all men who dive,” wrote Emerson. By moving out into a new world Abraham would discover truths about his life and his soul. Climbing up the mountain, Moses also explored inside his own heart. Every movement in the world occasions a movement inside the soul. Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam famously declared that after futile attempts to change the world, to reform his town, and even to influence his family, he realized at long last that he had to begin with himself.