



Shabbat Lech Lecha/7 Cheshvan 5778
October 27, 2017

Dear Shir Tikvah:

Avraham and Sarah go journeying in this week's parsha, Lech Lecha. They leave what is familiar: their land and their family and their social milieu, and become seekers. Through their travel, they learn what it means to become hosts, to shelter those who need refuge. Avraham and Sarah become for the Jewish people the example of what it means to truly embody radical hospitality: to notice the needy and meet them where they are.

In the Talmud, it's taught: Hospitality toward guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence, as Abraham interrupted connection with the Divine Presence while he tended to his guests appropriately. (Talmud Shabbat 127a)

The actions of Avraham and Sarah are contrasted with the actions of the people of Sodom:

Our Rabbis taught: The people of Sodom were proud because of the good that the Holy Blessed One gave them. What is written of them? "Earth, out of which food grows, is changed below as if into fire. Its rocks are a source of sapphires; it contains gold dust, too..." (Job 28:5-6). They said: Since bread comes forth out of our earth, and it has the dust of gold, why should we take in immigrants, who come to us only to deplete our wealth? Come, let us abolish the practice of traveling into our land, as it says: "They open up a shaft far from where men live, in places forgotten by wayfarers, destitute of people, far removed." (Job 28:4)

How horrifying that the anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies in our own country so closely resemble the words put in the mouths of the people of Sodom! Our Rabbis, themselves wanderers and immigrants, read these foundational Biblical stories as proof-texts for our obligation to offer radical hospitality, to offer sanctuary to those seeking refuge.

We've just begun the new cycle of Torah and already, I am so grateful for the gift of reading these familiar stories with new eyes, finding insight in this ancient text. May we be blessed to find treasures in Torah each time we open ourselves to her stories. May we be agitated and comforted, inspired and grounded, by the ways we re-meet the text this year.

ברוך אתה ה', אשר קדשנו במצותיו וציונו לעסוק בדברי תורה

Blessed are You, Source of Life, who commands us to immerse ourselves in the words of Torah.

Shabbat Shalom!
Rabbi Arielle Rosenberg