

Go

By Lauren Tuchman

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The last parsha told a lot of stories, ending with the Tower of Babel and then a list of names. For nine generations, the Torah tells us nothing else.

So we are on disabled time, thank heavens! We are used to long periods of waiting, resting, staying put, and being on hold with Social Security or Medicaid. The rabbis can't stand a silence, so they fill it with stories, one of which we will see momentarily. The normies can't stand it either, because they believe in productivity. Don't worry, many of them will join us eventually.

The story picks up again at the end of Noach with Terah and his children, including Avram, who will be central to the story for quite a while. Terah and his family set out for the land of Canaan, but they stop in Haran and settle there. A journey that stalls halfway is not a failure; it is where Terah's family lives for a while.

Then, suddenly, God speaks to Avram: Go.

After all this time

Why does God suddenly speak to Avram? The Torah doesn't say, but the rabbis saw a hole that needed filling. In Bereshit

Rabbah 39:1, Rabbi Yitzchak turns to Psalm 45, a song about a king marrying a princess. Verse 11 says, "Hear, daughter... forget your people and your father's house," which sounds like God telling Avram to go "from your kindred, from your father's house." Verse 12 says, "Let the king be aroused by your beauty; since he is your lord, bow to him."

Rabbi Yitzchak casts Avram as the princess and God as the king, so the line reads: "since God is your lord, bow to him." Notice what the verse assumes: the princess already knows who her lord is. So if Avram is the princess, he already knew God.

So why does God speak to Avram after all this time? This isn't a first meeting. It is a conversation in a relationship that has been going on all along, through all that apparent silence.

Go forth

God's first words to Avram are לך לך, *lech lecha*. This looks like a repeated word, and it comes from the root הלך, to go or to walk, the same root as *halacha*, the way we walk through the world.

But rabbinic tradition corrects me. This is not a repetition. The first word does mean "go," but the second is more mysterious. It looks the same on the page, yet it is made of a prefix meaning "to" or "for" and a suffix meaning "you" or "yours." Many translations flatten it to "Go forth." But the Hebrew can

also be read "go to yourself" or "go for yourself." Rashi hears it as "go for your own benefit, for your own good."

Then comes the odd part: God doesn't say where to go. It would be easier to plan with a destination. In Bereshit Rabbah 39:9, Rabbi Yochanan asks why God withholds it, and the answer is: "It was to make it more endearing to him, and to give him a reward for each and every stride."

This is a disabled reading. Every step, and I mean that broadly: every eye blink that controls a communication device, every push of a joystick, every movement that an attendant helps you make. Every stride is endearing.

Our society tells those of us with disabilities that we are not worthwhile unless we can hit benchmarks: becoming independent, getting stronger, walking again, returning to normal, accomplishing the task. But in *Lech Lecha* we learn that this is not what God wants. The value is not in reaching the benchmark. The value of a journey can be in the going itself.

I told you that the rabbis said this was not a repetition. But I always want to be a rebel. So I'm going back to my own reading of לך לך.

Go.

Go.

Maybe the first "go" is an invitation to move. Then the second wants you to really feel that movement. God knows how beautiful your body is and loves seeing you enjoy it.

Maybe the first go tells you to go inside. The second wants you to really connect with yourself. God knows how awesome you are and loves seeing you appreciating yourself.

Go.

With fatigue. With pain. With the voices. With the doubts. With the stinging. With the white cane. With the lights turned down. With a break from the noise. With the communication device. With extra time to understand. With hospitalization behind you, ahead of you, or right now.

Go.

With rest. With medication. With the wheelchair. With scars from suicide attempts. With help from another person. Without getting out of bed. With turning around because today it just doesn't work. With one step, or half a step, or a movement so small that nobody else would think to call it movement.

Go

You do not have to become less disabled in order to have a life.

You do not have to reach the destination for the step to be precious.

The step itself can be beloved.

Angela Vierling-Claassen is a queer disability activist, a Jew-by-choice, and the mother of two children, ages 17 and 20. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and lives with progressive multiple sclerosis, ADHD, and depression. Her spouse recently escaped to Canada to avoid the current trans genocide she is hoping to soon live in the same country as her spouse. Angela struggles currently with fatigue but has a dream of supporting and building communities of belonging for disabled and chronically ill people, and for anyone who has felt unwelcome or left out. She is COVID-cautious and loves lichen and watercolor painting.