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Lech Lecha as a Roadmap for Creativity

Julie Geller | Text and the City | Lecha Lecha 5775



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“How do you come up with songs? Do you just stand around waiting for inspiration to strike?”

As a singer/songwriter, I've been asked this question a number of times.

The answer is, well, no. Just like others who work in the arts, business, **academia**, and many other fields, my work depends on creating a high volume of content (in my case, [music](#) and [music videos](#)). So, no, I don't have the luxury - nor would I want - to stand around waiting for inspiration to strike.

So, over the years, I have had to come to terms with the answer to this question: **Where does creativity come from and how do I access it on a regular basis?**

This question sends me straight to the first sentence of *Parshat Lech Lecha*:

“And Adonai said to Abram:

‘Go to (for) yourself –

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and from your birthplace,
and from your father's house –
to the land that I will show you.” (Genesis 12 :1)

We know that in *Lech Lecha* Avraham undertakes a physical and spiritual journey. What I would like to suggest is that this first sentence of *Lech Lecha* also hints at something else: a roadmap for creativity. It lays out the steps for the inward journey that one must take when creating something.

How so? Let's look closely at the words:

- 1) **“Go to yourself”**: Go *into* yourself. Go into the deepest space inside yourself that you are able to access. That is where creation lies.
- 2) **“(Go) from your land”**: Creativity does not reside in a physical, worldly space. It may be inspired by something in this world but it is not born from that space. You must be willing to go somewhere even deeper.



3) **“(Go) from your birth place”**: In order to create, you must forget who you are. You must, at least for the moment, forget your station in life as well as your perceived identity and its inherent constraints.

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“Women don’t write things like this.”

“This will make me sound rich.”

“But I’m not a painter.”

“I’m not really an idea person.”

When we create, we tap into something so much more vast than the little space we take up on this Earth. Limiting ourselves by our own smallness and identities holds us back from touching the boundless source of creativity.

4) “**And (go) from your father’s house**”: So many of us, when we try to create, hear the voices of our parents, our siblings, or our teachers belittling us. Maybe someone made an offhand comment twenty years ago. Probably they didn’t even realize the ways in which they were shutting us down. But they did:

“Who are *you* to create?”

“You sing off key.”

“You can’t act.”

“We’re not creative types.”

“Do you think you’re better than us?”

“You’d better not let anybody know about our family.”

Sadly, so many of us were shamed out of our inherent sense of creativity as children. At some point, we began to believe that in order to merit of creating things that we had to be perfect at doing them. Now, where is that from? Did you ever once as a child think that you had to be perfect at creating something in

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order to do it? No! Did you even care what anybody thought of what you made? Of course not! But notice that that place of joy and playful abandon may have been replaced by a sense of fear and shame.

A quick story: A few years ago, a woman came up to me after a concert of mine and said, “I’m friends with so-and-so. She heard you were playing and wanted to come but she was too sick to make it.” Turns out so-and-so was my elementary school piano teacher. “Oh, she must have been surprised to find out that I’m a professional musician,” I said, knowing that there was nothing in my childhood that at all indicated that I would grow up to be a professional musician (If anything, my musical performance in my childhood indicated the opposite - that I had no musical talent whatsoever). “Well,” the woman said, taken aback, “I didn’t want to say anything but, yes, she was very surprised.”

So, this is not about your father’s house. This is not about what the adults around you thought you were capable of doing when you were a child. This is not about achieving perfection or obtaining permission to create (It you need permission, I am granting it to you. There, now go have fun!). This is about learning once again to access that place of tremendous joy called creation.

5) “**(Go) to the land that I will show you**”: Here’s the clincher, and, for many of us, the most difficult part of the creative process: You must be willing to go where the idea/song/poem/painting/sculpture leads *you*. When you sit down to create, you must cede control. You must shut off your editing brain. You must shut off your rational thoughts. You must shut off the part of you that is scared to follow. There is a greater intelligence at work here that will lead you to where it needs to go *if you will allow it*. You may show up with an idea of what you want to create or where you want to go, but you must be comfortable going wherever the process takes you.

And so, with this first sentence of *Lech Lecha*, the Torah is elbowing us, saying: Hey you, with your birth place, your identity of who you think you are! Yes, you, with your father’s house, your history that a part of you wants to use as an excuse to limit how far you can go! Here’s your chance to go into yourself, to go *for* yourself, to follow that creative urge, to touch something vast and profound and deeply satisfying. Go for it!

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