

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators presents

An Interactive PARSHA EXPERIENCE



Parsha: Lech-lecha

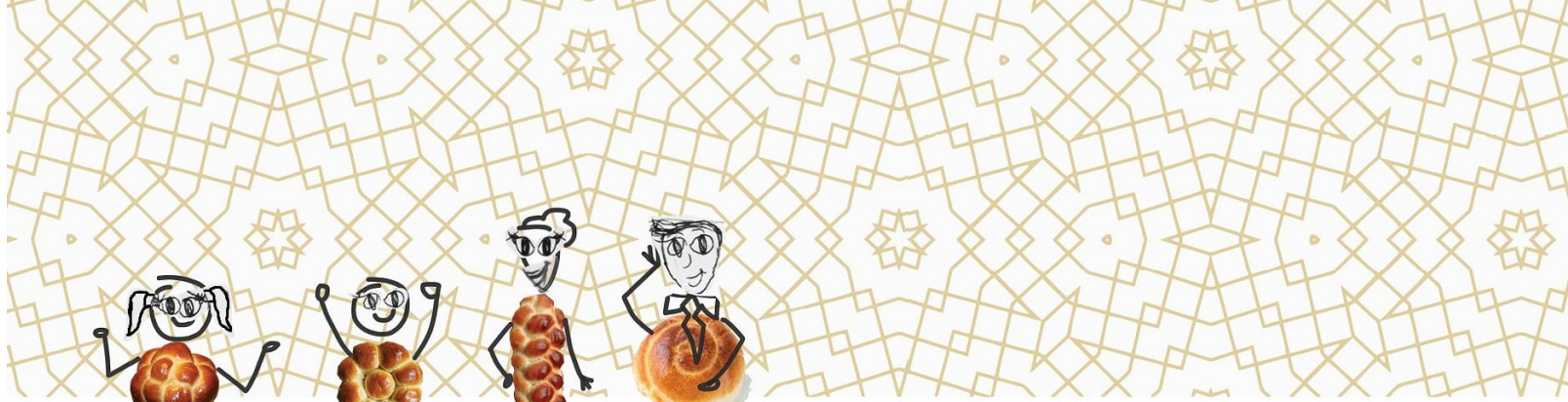
Title: Who is Up for the Challenge?

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The Parsha at First Glance

Spotlight on the Parsha:

At the very start of *Parshat Lech-lecha*, God famously begins speaking to Avram - seemingly out of nowhere! God doesn't introduce Himself to Avram - God just cuts right to the chase and commands Avram to do something really difficult and kind of crazy. God says, "Leave behind your homeland, your family and everything



that is familiar to you so that you can go someplace new and strange. If you do this, I will bless you and make you a great nation.” And Avram does it! He agrees to go on God’s *Lech-lecha* mission... and as we probably know, this is the start of a very close relationship between God and Avram that, according to our tradition, still lasts today (since we are Avram/Avraham’s descendents)!

Zooming In:

There are a lot of interesting and puzzling aspects to this little piece of narrative. One question that many people ask (hopefully you did too!) is: Why did God choose Avram for this mission and give him the chance to earn such a wonderful blessing? Was it random or had God seen something special in Avram that made God believe that Avram would be up for this challenge and deserving of this reward?

To help you think about this question we have shared a midrash - a story written over 1,000 years ago by Rabbis - which tries to answer these kinds of questions about the Torah. But, before you look at one of the answers provided by the midrash, think about what kind of person YOU think would be up for this kind of a challenge.

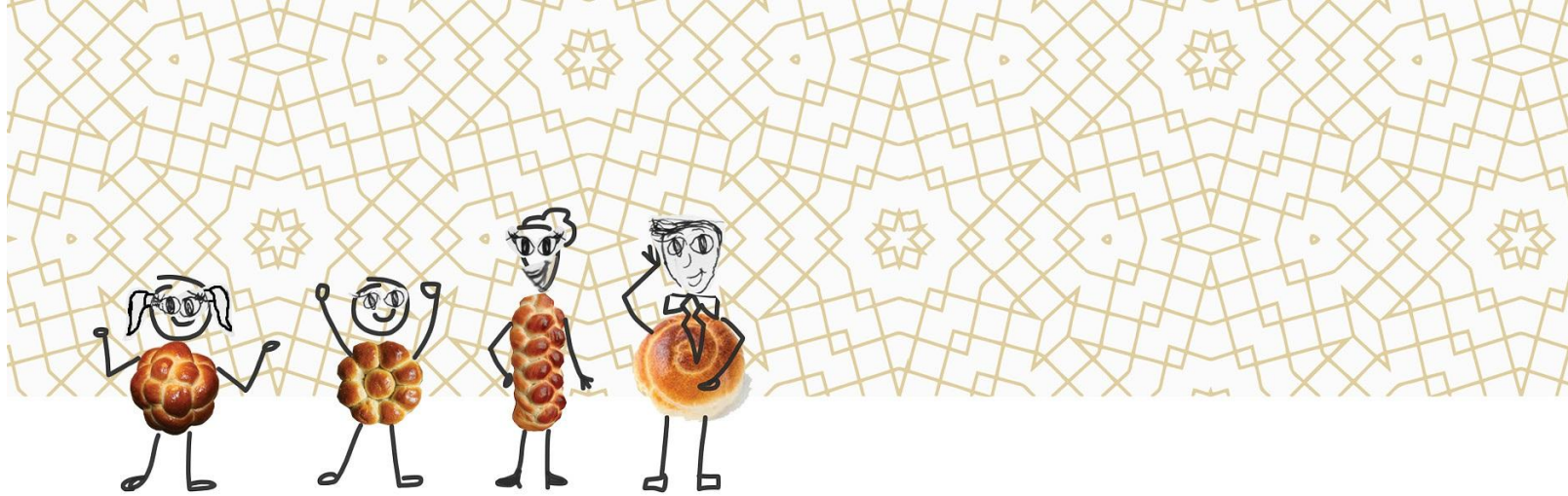
Question for Consideration:

What characteristics, strengths and/or behaviors would a person need to exhibit to be chosen for this kind of mission and blessing?



Midrash Matters:

Now, here is the story that the writers of the midrash use to describe the kind of person *they* thought God would have chosen for this special mission (this is a



paraphrased English version of a midrash found in Genesis Rabbah 38:13). This story **does not** appear in the Torah, but can be told in order to help us better understand the stories that do appear in the biblical text. The Rabbis imagine that this story might have happened before God spoke to Avram at the start of our *parsha*:

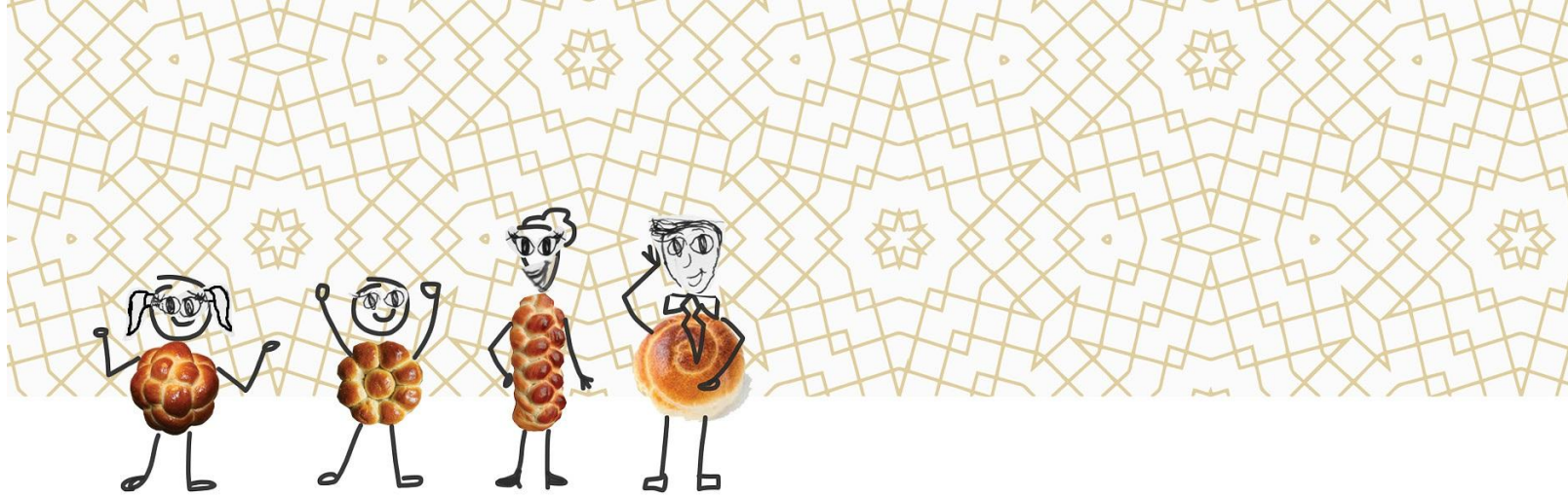
Terah, Avram's father, was a worshipper of idols and even ran an idol shop which sold little statues for worship. One time Terah had to be away from his shop for a day, and he left Avram in charge.

A little later on, a woman entered the shop carrying a dish full of flour, which she wanted to offer as a sacrifice to the idols in the shop. She said to Avram: "This is for you to offer before the idols." Avram took a large stick in his hands and quickly broke all of the idols in the shop, except for one! He then placed the club in the hands of the biggest idol. The woman, quite shocked, left the shop in a hurry.

When Avram's father returned, he asked: "Who did all of this!? Who broke all of the idols!?" Avram replied: "I can't hide it from you - a woman came carrying a dish of flour and told me to offer it before them. I did as she asked, but then one of the idols said 'I will eat it first,' and another shouted 'NO, I will eat it first!' Soon, all the idols were fighting over the flour offering. Finally, the biggest one got up, took a large stick, and smashed the rest of the idols."

Terah retorted angrily: "What, do you think you can trick me? These idols can't think or talk or move! How could they fight one another!?" "Well," Avram replied: "Do your ears hear what your mouth is saying? Why do you worship these idols as gods, if they can't think, talk or move!?"

Terah was so angry that he took Avram to see King Nimrod, even though Terah knew that Avram could get a very big punishment from the king - even be killed! - for smashing idols. Even after arguing with King Nimrod for some time, Avram



would not back down; he was just so sure that worshipping idols was really silly. Avram believed only in God. And so, it was decreed that Avram must be thrown into a fiery furnace for disrespecting the idols and the king. Just before Avram was sent to his death, Nimrod shouted: “If the God you worship is so powerful, let Him save you from the fire.” And indeed, that is just what happened - Avram miraculously was pulled out of the burning hot furnace without a scratch (or burn) on his body.

Question:

Based on the midrash above, what kind of person did the Rabbis think was suitable for God’s *Lech-lecha* challenge and blessing? What kinds of characteristics, strengths or talents does Avram demonstrate in this rabbinic story that made him worthy of being God’s choice for this special mission?

Story Time:

Each person around the table should choose one or two of the characteristics that have been suggested.

Now, try to think of a time where you either:

- felt like you exhibited these characteristics
- wanted to exhibit those characteristics but found it too hard
- observed someone else act that way
- hope in the future you will act this way

Share your stories/reflections, if you feel comfortable!

Shabbat Shalom!