

Lech Lecha 2013

Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick on October 12, 2013

This Shabbat we are concluding our three part Sermon Study Series called “Facing Your Insecurities.” We have been talking about the Eternal Truths that come from these most ancient stories of our people. And I want to close the series by addressing our greatest fear. Now you might think that our greatest fear is the fear of dying. And when I was a kid I guess that was what I thought. But when I talk to people who are getting up in years, it’s not that they are afraid of dying, they are afraid of suffering. They are afraid of growing weak and feeble.

And the Torah has a very subtle but powerful way of addressing this fear: They make the heroes old to start with. In the beginning of this week’s Torah portion we learn that Abraham was 75 years old when he left Haran, and he was in his 90’s when Gd really put him to work. At the age that most people would be thinking about retirement, Abraham was finding his true life calling. And it was Abraham’s renewed sense of purpose that rejuvenated him, much, by the way, to Abraham’s surprise.

I was in Target this week and I happened to walk by the greeting card aisle. I don’t usually stop there. I’m more of a letter writer than a card kind of guy, but something caught my eye. It was something I never noticed, and I don’t know how long they have had them, but I saw a whole rack of cards for your 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, your 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, your 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, your 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I even saw cards for your 100<sup>th</sup> birthday! I don’t remember seeing those kinds of cards when I was growing up, and for good reason: People are living longer now. The average life expectancy for a man when my father was born was 59 years. Now it’s 77. People are living longer and staying more active in their later years than ever before. And one of the messages of Abraham’s calling as an older man is that you may stop working, but you still have important work to do in making a contribution to the world.

Abraham is called when he is in the latter part of his life, just like Moses was. Remember, Moses had three 40 year parts of his life. He had 40 years in Egypt as Pharaoh’s step-son. He had 40 years as a shepherd. And he had 40 years as the leader of the Jewish People. But it was not until the last part of his life that he found that true calling. It was like Moses got a greeting card on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday – Mazal Tov on your new job! And one thing that Abraham and Moses have in common, besides that they were both old men when Gd called the, is that right after the promise of great things, they faced their toughest challenges.

Abraham is told by Gd “I am going to bless you and I am going to make your name great.” Wonderful! Who wouldn’t want to hear that! But then immediately after that there is a terrible famine and if Abraham realizes that if he stays in Canaan his whole family is going to be wiped out. And Abram knows he has to go into a hostile land, and he worries that his wife is going to be killed. It all turns out fine in the end, but he does not know that. All he knows is that along with the promises came great challenges. But it is in pushing through those challenges in his old age that Abram stays vital, and even,

in a sense, reverses the aging process. It's after this challenge that he finds out he is going to be a father! This is the Torah's way of teaching us the way of dealing with this greatest fear and insecurity- by rising to new challenges. All of these trials and tribulations only strengthen Avram's sense of purpose. He only gets braver as he gets older.

You see you can't control your biological fate, but you can shape your own destiny. The way to address the insecurity of old age, according to the Torah, is to keep a strong sense of purpose and mission. As Avram found out, it's not going to be easy, but rising to meet new challenges is what keeps Avram young and vital, and the same is true for you, too.

In this week's Torah portion, Avram and Sarai are only getting started. It will be a couple of years before they have a child. And even then they are surprised at what they are able to achieve. But from these ancient stories we can cull a very important piece of timeless wisdom, and here it is:

If you are going to overcome your fear and insecurity when it comes to growing old, you have to know in your heart that it is never, ever too late. It is never too late to get a renewed sense of calling. It is never too late to get a fresh start.

I remember a couple years ago I was feeling burnt out. I just felt tired, like I had played out the hand that was dealt to me and I was out of cards. By an outsider's measure I was successful, but inside I felt like I was stagnating, and falling into a rut... But I knew enough to go and see someone much older and wiser than me to talk about it. So I went to see my friend Ethel J. David, who is in her late 90's and I told her how I felt, how my sense of purpose was flagging, how I was just tired and played out. And she told me something I will never forget. She said, "Just because the wind has gone out of your sails, doesn't mean you need to jump overboard. A new wind will come and fill them up again. Now go position yourself to find those new winds." And she was right.

And so I'll end this series the way I began, by reminding you of the most often repeated phrase in the entire Bible, and it is "Do not be afraid." Don't be afraid of any stage of your life. Do not allow fear and insecurity to keep you from finding new wind for your sails. You have strength of character and wisdom and life experience that the world needs. You have untapped potential at every stage of your life, and it is never too late to find a renewed sense of calling, and that's why these biblical heroes are old when their journeys begin. It is the most powerful reminder that our life journey continues until the day we pass, and even after that. That sense of calling, of purpose, of vision and destination renews itself when we truly believe that Gd continues to call us at every stage of our lives, to move closer to the place that He will show us. And to bring this idea into our hearts as well as our minds, to have it resonate in our souls, the Hazzan is going to teach a song that we can carry with us as a constant reminder that we are all on a journey, as individuals and as a community: ["Lechi Lach..."](#)

