

***This week's Torah portion, Parshat Lech Lecha begins with the directive that G-D gives Abraham, to leave the land of Charan and travel to the land of Canaan. The opening verse says, "Now G-D said unto Avram: 'Go for yourself out of your country, and from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you". The Gerrer Rebbe asks that the order of the verse seems to be contrary to the natural sequence of Avram's travel itinerary. When Avram is ordered to leave his native land and enter into the land of Canaan, naturally the first step (as in any travel plan) should involve leaving his point of origin, his father's house. After leaving his house, then he would travel further and exit his birthplace, the village that he was born in. It is only in the last stage of his journey that he would pass border control and eventually leave his native country. Why then does the Torah list the stages of his journey in the reverse order, beginning with his land and concluding with his father's house?***

***The Gerrer Rebbe explains that G-D's directive was not just a commandment to begin his physical journey, nor was the commandment just for Avram. The Torah is not a history book and would not be describing Avraham's journey if it were not relevant forever and for all of us. Rather, explains the Rebbe, as G-D had chosen Avram to be the progenitor of the Jewish people, in order for that process to begin, Avram first needed to distance himself from his father's home emotionally and spiritually. This voyage was not meant to simply remove himself from the physical proximity of his father's abode, but more importantly from the spiritual, and emotional proximity of his father's culture and society. In order to begin laying the building blocks and foundation of our great nation, Avram had to completely remove any trace or remnant from the values, morals and ethics of his father's family. The entire ethos of the Jewish nation is so wholly and totally counters to the pervasive philosophy in Avraham's generation that this transformative journey was an absolute imperative.***

***Avraham's sojourn from Charan to Canaan begins our national transformation from an idolatrous, pagan, and even immoral society to the kind, giving, and compassionate people that we are today. However, anytime wholesale changes in mentality and philosophy are made there is a process and order to these changes. It is simply impractical to make immediate drastic wholesale changes and if they were possible would those changes last? Probably not. True and permanent change needs to occur incrementally, tackling the easier things first before getting to the hard ones. The first step in change is to try to change things that are easier to change because they are not fully ingrained within us. These may be ideals and behaviors that have been picked up from the country around us, but are not as difficult to overcome as things that are more ingrained with us and more central to us. The next step would be to change the things that are from our birthplace, the city or town that we grew up in. Finally, only after we have overcome the societal pressures of our country and our birthplace, we can then seek to overcome even the morals and values that we have learnt from our family. This process of change is not only the most effective and productive way to become a better person; it might be the only way to truly become a better person. It is now understandable why G-D tells Avram to leave his land first and only at the very end tells him to leave his father's house.***

***At some point in our lives we will go through a change process that is similar to our forefather Avraham's process. G-D's directive to him is as relevant to us now, as it was to him then. Change cannot happen overnight and immediately, rather it occurs in stages, with patience and foresight. Hopefully our journeys of change will be as successful and as meaningful as Avraham's were so many years ago.***

***Shabbat Shalom  
Rabbi Meir Tannenbaum***