

Parashat Lekh Lekha (Genesis 12:1-17:27)

Parashat Lekh Lekha is the beginning of the Jewish journey. *Lekh Lekha* also is the beginning of the Muslim journey, since Abram (later Abraham) has two sons, one with Hagar, Sarah's maid servant, (Ishmael) and one with Sarah (Isaac). Rabbi Michal Shekel (executive director of the Toronto Board of Rabbis and spiritual leader at Har Tikvah in Brampton, Ontario) points out some interesting parallels between Abraham's and Hagar's stories.

In *Lekh Lekha*, Abraham leaves his home, makes a covenant with God, and is told his son's name. Hagar also leaves her home (because Sarah expels her), makes a covenant with God (who promises she will have numerous offspring, just like Abraham), and learns her son's name from God. Hagar does one thing, though, that Abraham doesn't: She gives God a name, *El Roi* (God who sees me; Gen. 16:13). Hagar is the only person in the Bible to give God a name.

Names are a big deal in the Bible. God shares power with Adam by letting him name the animals. Names in the Bible also carry great meaning: When God changes Abram's and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah, the added letter *hei* indicates a heightened measure of spirituality, since *hei* is one of the letters in God's name. But Hagar's name already contains the letter *hei*, and this explains her ability to name God. Hagar's relationship with God is personal, informal, and innate. Unlike Abraham, Hagar doesn't require signs or reassurances from God, or ceremonies to mark her connection. While Abraham is the first person in the Bible to believe in God (Gen. 15:6), Hagar may be the first person in the Bible to have no doubt about God.

Gut Shabbos/Shabbat Shalom