



## 5 choices for God

*“So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him...”* (Genesis 12:4).

Abraham embraces a choice for God, a choice that includes a future land, a nation, and a great blessing for ‘all the families of the earth’ (12:3). Yet his decision also involves renunciation of his present life. Let these words of Torah resonate in your prayer as you consider your life choices and the summons to moral responsibility.

### 1. Go!

If Abraham, a wealthy man, has any inclination to cling to his property, God says, “Leave your land.”

### 2. Go!

If Abraham, who is settled in the land of Ur, has any inclination to hide behind his cultural circumstances, God says, “Leave your kindred.”

### 3. Go!

If Abraham has any inclination to blame his family upbringing, God says, “Leave your father’s house.”

### 4. Go!

Says a Jewish author: Marx told us that the human being is the product of social forces. Spinoza said that we are determined by genetic factors. Freud said that we are controlled by relational traumas. The Torah tells us that we are divinely endowed with free will.

### 5. Go!

A Prayer: God of freedom, thank you for freely choosing me. Lead me to the depths of your choice. And from there, may I choose you. Amen.

# Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.

## Why reflect on Torah?

Have you ever walked into a theatre in the middle of a play? Yes, you quickly pick up the dialogue and actions of the stage characters, but it takes a while to understand what’s going on and how all the pieces fit together. That’s because you’ve already missed the scenes that preceded this moment.

Our bible reading can be a bit like that, especially for we Catholics who turn up to Mass on Sundays and hear readings from Scripture selected for the liturgy. Unless we know the story that went before, it can be somewhat bewildering. How important it is to become familiar with the larger biblical picture beyond our Sunday lectionary and especially the great foundational bible stories—like those in the Torah (Pentateuch), the first five books of the bible.

Enter *Light of Torah*: a succinct, readable leaflet introducing Catholics to some of the great stories, personalities and themes of the Torah. Each weekly issue follows the Jewish cycle of readings, drawing on the commentators and interpretative traditions of Judaism from whom “Christians can learn a great deal” (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2001).



Genesis 12:1—17:27

*Lekh lekha:*  
‘go forth’



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## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

### Genesis 12:1—17:27

Abraham, the founding father of our faith, is central to our Torah portion this week. Actually, as the story opens he is called Abram. Only later, in 17:5, will God change his name to Abraham. Read as much of the portion as you can. It is an engaging narrative! Our intense focus, however, will be on those dramatic opening words of commissioning in Genesis 12:1.

Bibliography: Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, rev. ed. (NY: URJ Press, 2006); Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation* (Jerusalem, 2009).  
Scripture: NRSV.

## Tasting Torah

“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (12:1).

“Lekh lekha...” The Hebrew term can be variously translated: *Go, go forth, travel, leave*.

These words introduce the story of one man whose decision to step out and follow a divine call changes the course of history. Not only does this mark the beginnings of Judaism, but from here two other faiths claiming Abrahamic roots will emerge: Christianity and Islam.

Exactly what is it about this story that justifies its religious centrality? Who and what have led to this critical moment? If you have been reading Genesis to this point, you will recall the saga of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood. Against the backdrop of these characters and their behavior, what can you say about Abraham’s entrance centre-stage?

## Touching Torah

Perhaps you noticed that the moral fibre of each of the previous characters displays serious flaws. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, a contemporary Jewish Torah commentator, observes that their flaw in common is evasion or abdication of responsibility. Do you agree? Think back on the preceding chapters of Genesis. Pool your knowledge with your *havrutah* partner (discussion partner). Revisit parts of Genesis if you need to recall a particular scene.

## Depthing Torah

Sacks, drawing on the greater biblical narrative, describes the character of Abraham from the moment of call through the chapters that follow.

- Unlike Adam (who blames Eve who blames the serpent), Abraham accepts *personal* responsibility in adhering to God’s word. (See 12:4)
- Unlike Cain (‘*Am I my brother’s keeper?*’ 4:9) Abraham accepts *moral* responsibility, rescuing his brother’s son, Lot (Gen. 14).
- Unlike Noah (who is silent when God announces the destruction of humanity), Abraham prays for the inhabitants of Sodom and asks God to spare them (Gen. 18). He accepts *collective* responsibility.

In other words, Abraham, in resisting excuses and in his wholehearted response to the summons to ‘Go forth’ to a new land, charts a radical path in the history of humankind; one defined by a *personal free choice to follow God without hesitation or reserve*.

## Doing Torah

“Lekh lekha...” Go forth... According to one Jewish (Hassidic) interpretation, *Lekh lekha* means “*Go to yourself*,” i.e., find that deep freedom planted within every human being, and set your moral compass from there.

**Reflect:** What excuses sometimes deter me when God says, “Go forth...”? Do my personal choices come from that deep place of inner freedom where I am truly ‘myself’ before God?



## Faith & Life

A university professor tells this story:

“It was 1970. A mood of unrest rippled through the student body. I stood before a class of students while they all booed me. I was a young, relatively inexperienced teacher, and my insides were churning. In that moment I was faced with a choice: to walk out or to hold my ground. If I had walked I don’t think I’d have stepped back inside a classroom ever again.”

Decades later, this respected academic not only continues to teach but shows remarkable compassion for the students and staff in his care. The decision of a young teacher grew into the vocation of a wise professor.