Anonymous Souls: Thoughts for Parashat Lekh Lekha

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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Lekh Lekha

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

“And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had made in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan…” (Bereishith 12:5).

Abram heeded God’s call to leave his land, his birthplace and his father’s home and to set off for a new land where he would become a great nation. His wife and nephew accompanied him; but so did “the souls they had made in Haran.” Who were these “souls?”

Rabbinic tradition has it that Abram and Sarai spread the belief in one God. Abram converted the men and Sarai converted the women. The “souls they had made in Haran” were followers of the teachings of Abram and Sarai. This anonymous group not only adhered to the beliefs of Abram and Sarai, but they chose to make enormous sacrifices to accompany their teachers to the new land. Like their leaders, they too had to leave their homeland and their families. Their devotion to Abram and Sarai—and to One God—was remarkable.

These “souls” were not just spiritual followers; they were willing to risk their lives for their teacher. When Abram’s nephew Lot was captured in a war, “Abram led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen of them” (Bereishith 14:14). Supported by this impressive militia, Abram was victorious in battle. When the spoils of war were offered to him, Abram refused to take anything but insisted that his men receive their fair share in appreciation of their bravery. Just as the souls were loyal to Abram, Abram was loyal to them.

The Torah focuses on the lives of Abram, Sarai and their descendants. It does not tell us what happened to the anonymous souls. Did they retain their faith in One God? Did they pass on the faith of Abram and Sarai to their children and grandchildren?

I think the Torah suggests that these unusually good people continued to impact society positively. They were deeply attached to the ideas and ideals of Abram and Sarai and sacrificed much on behalf of their teachers and their One God. These souls, even though not part of the family of Abram and Sarai, were the representatives of faith and righteousness to society at large. They stood with Abram and Sarai loyally and courageously. They became leaders in general society by spreading the faith and teachings of Abram and Sarai.

These anonymous souls deserve respect and appreciation. They represent the good people of every generation—including our own—who stand faithfully and loyally with the descendants of Abram and Sarai. They are with us in good times and bad; they sacrifice for us and for our shared ideals. The Talmud teaches that the righteous of all nations have a place in the world to come. These anonymous souls are among the righteous who deserve not only a place in the world to come, but our sincere respect and appreciation in this world.