

Parshat Lech Lecha, Leffell newsletter 2025

The language of *emunah*, belief, is surprisingly hard to find in Torah. Even Abraham is credited with *emunah* only once, several chapters after we first meet him. וַיֵּאֱמֶן אַבְרָם “And Abram believed in God.” (Breishit 15:6) For the father of monotheism, a brand new system of *belief*, isn’t this a bit late to see the language of *emunah*, belief?

Of course, as Jews, we know that knowing *what* Abraham believes is not actually the point. Instead, we see our hero’s belief system through his actions. Who other than a true believer would pick up his family and move out of his homeland to follow the will of his creator? From his very first moment, Abraham is good at taking direction and going down a new path. *Lech Lecha*, God tells him, leave everything you know, and Abraham does. It’s Abraham’s actions that say more about him than any statement of faith.

The Rambam (Maimonides) lists the ten trials of Abraham, starting with this very moment, Abraham’s willingness to get up and go. Rambam comments on God’s goal in giving Abraham so many tasks: to honor his behavior, not his thoughts.

להיות לו שכר מעשה טוב לא שכר לב טוב בלבד.

God wanted to give Abraham the reward for his good action, for *ma’aseh tov*, not just the reward for a *lev tov*, a good heart.

God wanted Abraham to be a model of action, not just internal beliefs.

What if we were to judge everyone for their *ma’asim*, their actions, instead of for their *emunah*, their beliefs? Jews today have so many belief systems on so many topics. From religious practice to political views, we might easily fall into the trap of judging others by what they think rather than by what they do. If we want to be the spiritual descendants of Abraham, however, we will need to be models of action, no matter what we might believe, and we will need to look to others to do the same. *Lech Lecha* reminds us that we don’t need to know what our neighbors believe, what their politics are, or what they think in order to learn from them. Like Abraham, we can start by acting in good faith with one another; discussion of what we actually believe can come later. Shabbat shalom.