



## **SERMON LECH L'CHA:<sup>1</sup> CHANGING THE FUTURE**

Student Rabbi Gabriel Kanter-Webber, Saturday 16 October 2021  
Brighton and Hove Progressive Synagogue

Bar Mitzvah of Emmanuel

- 1 Should I still be here at BHPS in the year 2050, our Rosh Hashanah tashlich might be taking place considerably closer to the shul. The think-tank Climate Central warns<sup>2</sup> that the whole beach, the pier, and large parts of Hove and Portslade could be underwater, if sea levels continue rising at their current rate.
- 2 How could we react to that? There are, perhaps, three choices. We could just deal with it: that's the future, it's fixed, let's get some sandbags in ready. Option two, we could stand on the beach, like King Canute, trying to hold back the encroaching waters with the force of our personality and, perhaps, the force of our prayer. Thirdly, we could try to change things in a more practical and targeted way.
- 3 Two of those options offer certainty. The mindless optimism of King Canute and the craven acceptance of going out to buy some sandbags are both guaranteed to make no difference. The third carries a risk, and that risk is uncertainty. It might work, it might not, and we won't know for quite some time. Yet it's still clearly the most – the only – sensible option.
- 4 Parashat Lech L'cha is all about Abram, as he was then called, taking a massive risk. He left his home, his familiar environment, everything he



knew and recognised, for the chance of gains elsewhere. The commentator Ramban<sup>3</sup> tells us that Abram kept moving across the land, further and further, constantly packing up his tent and repatching it, travelling closer and closer to the place where he would be able to have an impact.

- 5 That might make it look like Abram took our option 1: as sea levels rise and the continent shrinks, moving further and further inland. Running away from something rather than running towards something.
- 6 But we know he was running towards something, and that something was a better future. He wasn't fleeing. He was on a guided, life-changing journey.
- 7 Life-changing and, indeed, future-changing. In the passage which you read so beautifully, Emmanuel, you showed us just how certain Abram was that he would never have children. Yet he did have a child. The great commentator Rashi<sup>4</sup> imagines God telling Abram and Sarai that it was at one time true that he would never have children, but then adding, "I will change your names to Abraham and Sarah, and your future will be changed."
- 8 Your future will be changed!
- 9 Even things that look absolutely set in stone can be altered. We should never give up hope.
- 10 Emmanuel, you're someone who has a real interest in biology and animals and the natural world. But one word you wrote in your questionnaire really struck me: conservation. You're passionate about protecting



endangered species, and you want to turn the tide of environmental destruction. In other words, you too are seeking to change the future.

- 11 The Israeli singer Arik Einstein wrote a song which said, “Ani v’atah n’shaneh et ha-olam”: you and I shall change the world. That is the dream which Abram and Sarai cherished, a better life for themselves and for their fellow people, and it is a dream you, Emmanuel, have adopted too.
- 12 So we wish you mazal tov on your wonderful service this morning, yesher ko’ach on your hopes for the future, every blessing on this wonderful occasion – and, we hope, a dry home for many years to come.

## **GKW 16.10.21**

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 15:1-21

<sup>2</sup> Harry Bullmore. “The areas of Sussex which could be underwater by 2050”, *The Argus* (23 March 2021): <<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/19179801.areas-sussex-underwater-2050/>>

<sup>3</sup> Ramban to Genesis 12:1

<sup>4</sup> Rashi to Genesis 15:5