Genesis 12:1–17:27 · Shabbat, October 24, 2026

Go toward yourself.

Lech-Lecha is a story of leaving inherited expectations, receiving new names, negotiating covenant in the body, and widening the meaning of family. This guide holds classical sources beside queer Jewish reclamation—without pretending they say the same thing.



לֶךְ־לְךָ

Lech lecha can be heard as “go forth,” “go for yourself,” or, in a Chassidic reading, “go to yourself.”

Haftarah: Isaiah 40:27–41:16

Text	Reclamation	Caution
What Genesis and classical sources say.	How queer Jews read and reuse the tradition.	Where a creative reading goes beyond plain sense.

01 · MAP

Seven movements through the portion

A compact route through the narrative before the interpretive work begins.

12:1–9

The call

Abram, 75, leaves land, birthplace, and father's house with Sarai and Lot. God promises nationhood, blessing, and a great name.

12:10–20

Egypt

Famine forces migration. Abram asks Sarai to pass as his sister; Pharaoh takes her, God strikes his house, and Abram leaves enriched.

Chapter 13

Lot separates

Household strife leads Abram to offer Lot first choice. Lot settles toward Sodom; the land promise is renewed.

Chapter 14

War & rescue

Abram rescues Lot with 318 retainers. Malchizedek, priest of God Most High, blesses him. Abram is called *ha'ivri*, "the Hebrew / the other."

Chapter 15

Covenant between the pieces

Descendants "as the stars," severed animals, a smoking furnace and flaming torch—and a prophecy of 400 years of enslavement.

Chapter 16

Hagar & Ishmael

Sarai gives Hagar to Abram; pregnant and afflicted, Hagar flees. An angel calls her by name. She names God *El-Ro'i*, "God who sees me."

Chapter 17

Names & bodies

Abram becomes Abraham; Sarai becomes Sarah. Isaac is promised, and circumcision becomes the embodied sign of covenant.

A reading posture

No simple hero

The portion’s liberating motifs coexist with coercion, concealment, reproductive injustice, and collateral damage. Queer reading can claim the blessing without looking away.

02 · CALL

Leaving as a route to becoming

The Torah's first command to Abraham is not arrival. It is departure without a disclosed destination.

לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ

"Go forth from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you."

Genesis 12:1 · wording follows the research report's Sefaria-based text

Traditional / philological

The destination is withheld

The three departures move inward—from country, to birthplace, to household. A Chassidic reading turns the apparently redundant *lecha* into a spiritual instruction: go to your inner core.

Modern queer reading

Coming out is not only disclosure

Keshet's "Walk Towards Yourself" hears the verse as releasing messages from upbringing that required heterosexuality—and recognizes that many people travel far from where they were born to flourish. David

Traditional baseline:
Chabad.org weekly Torah hub

Katzenelson reads self-wholeness as the first step of *tikkun olam*: "we have to honestly be ourselves."

Keshet: Walk Towards Yourself · **David Katzenelson: Extinguishing the Flames**

The shadow of the journey: Lisa Huberman's reading through *Transparent* warns that becoming oneself does not excuse harm. Abraham's mission leaves collateral damage—especially Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac. Liberation and accountability belong in the same conversation.

Passing for survival

"She is my sister"

Keshet's archive links Abram's Egypt ruse to strategic concealment of a relationship in a hostile setting. This is a creative application; classical commentators defend the statement as technically true.

Avram ha'ivri

Standing on the other side

Genesis Rabbah imagines the whole world on one side and Abram on the other. Rabbi James Greene uses "the other" as an emblem of an LGBTQ journey toward identity with little assurance and, often, aloneness.

Keshet: The Unknown Path

03 · NAMES

The true name arrives later

Genesis 17 reverses a familiar hierarchy: the earlier name is provisional; the new name is divinely spoken into covenant.

אַבְרָם

Abram

“Exalted father”; in Rashi’s reading, father of Aram.

→

אַבְרָהָם

Abraham

Av hamon, father of a multitude of nations.

שָׂרַי

Sarai

“My princess”—particular and possessed.

→

שָׂרָה

Sarah

“Princess”—universal in Rashi’s reading.

Traditional status change

Trans resonance

A changed role receives a changed name

Rashi reads Abraham's added *heh* as widening his vocation. Bereshit Rabbah imagines the removed *yod* from Sarai protesting until it is restored in Yehoshua. Reform Judaism's commentary places the episode in a biblical pattern where role-change calls for name-change.

Reform Judaism: Change of Name, Change of Status

A chosen name as blessing and prayer

For trans Jews whose chosen names are treated as less real, the parashah stages the opposite: God affirms the later name. Rabbi Noah Arnow, writing about the parallel Hoshea→Yehoshua change, calls a name change "a kind of prayer"—a future held in the name itself.

Modern midrashic application, not the plain sense of Genesis 17.

Continuity matters too. Rabbi Hannah's reading of Rashi notes that Abraham's *resh* remains: the past is carried into the new name, not obliterated. Becoming need not require narrating the earlier self as false.

04 · ANCESTORS

Gender variance at the family's beginning

A remarkable Talmudic passage is more matter-of-fact than many contemporary communities.

טומטומין

tumtumin · people of indeterminate sexual characteristics

What Yevamot 64b actually says

In a discussion about ancestral infertility, Rabbi Ami says Abraham and Sarah were *tumtumin*, reading Isaiah 51's "hewn" and "dug" as hints that sexual organs were formed for them over time. Rav Nahman, citing Rabbah bar Avuha, says Sarah was an *aylonit* and lacked a womb.

Queer teachers reclaim the passage as ancestral precedent. TransTorah extends it to say the first Jews later "transitioned genders"; the "Toldot Trans" source sheet playfully asks not whether they were trans, but what kind.

Toldot Trans source sheet · **TransTorah: How I Met the Tumtum**

Responsible framing: the sugya's plain concern is infertility, not gender identity, and it does not question Abraham's or Sarah's gender. The passage offers queer Jews a precedent for sex/gender variance treated without alarm. "Transitioned genders" is the modern author's extension, not the Talmud's own claim.

05 · BODY

Where does covenant live?

Genesis 17 marks covenant in flesh. Contemporary trans halakhists do not merely reject that problem; they reason from within it.

Classical obligation

Genesis 17:10–14 commands circumcision of every *zakhar* at eight days as "a sign of the covenant." Classical halakhah attaches the obligation anatomically.

Trans-halakhic negotiation

Zachary Carruthers's SVARA teshuva reasons that a trans Jew with exclusively "female" characteristics is exempt; surgically transitioned trans men are analogous to one "born circumcised," because there is no foreskin. Brin Solomon warns that anatomy-first rulings can misgender trans

Affirming reframing

Deuteronomy 30:6 internalizes the image: God will "circumcise your heart." Sai Koros's "Queer Covenants" uses that verse to ask what covenants queer relationships create and uphold.

people and fail intersex bodies.

Dignity as halakhic practice: the Rabbinical Assembly's Conservative teshuva says the mitzvah applies to any person with a penis, while insisting it must never be raised unprompted with a trans woman, out of *k'vod habriyot*, human dignity.

SVARA: Carruthers teshuva · **SVARA: Solomon teshuva** · **Rabbinical Assembly teshuva**

06 · HAGAR

The unseen names God

The portion's family-building story is also an account of reproductive coercion, flight, seeing, and voice.

"You are El-Ro'i"—
God who sees me.

Genesis 16:13 · Hagar is the only human in Tanakh to bestow a name on God.

Called by name

Sarai never addresses Hagar directly in the narrative. The angel finds her in the wilderness and calls her by name. Lynn Gottlieb's modern midrash "Achti" moves the women from rivalry toward sisterly reconciliation and treats the failure to name the stranger as a moral wound.

TheTorah.com: Reconciling Hagar and Sarah

Surrogacy without consent

Hagar is Torah's first surrogate, and the story does not permit romanticizing her use. Rabbi Rachel Greengrass stresses that neither Hagar nor Sarah has reproductive freedom; Hagar cannot make dignified choices about her fertility. For queer family-building through surrogacy, donation, or adoption, the

text asks: whose wishes are consulted, whose labor is obscured, and who retains personhood?

God seen from the margins +

An enslaved, pregnant Egyptian runaway names the divine. For LGBTQ people unseen or misnamed by family and community, Hagar's scene suggests that those whom a household refuses to see can name God back.

Blessing is not zero-sum +

Ishmael receives a promise of nationhood in Genesis 16:10 and 17:20. The chosen line does not exhaust divine care; belonging need not depend on someone else's exclusion.

Source boundary: the research found influential feminist, womanist, and reproductive-justice readings of Hagar, but no specifically queer-Jewish Hagar commentary. The three applications above are study-leader extensions and should be presented as such.

07 · KINSHIP

Queer kinship as covenant

Lech-Lecha's promises are dynastic, yet the portion repeatedly exceeds a narrow account of family.

Chosen and taught. Sanhedrin 19b says one who teaches Torah to another's child is treated by Scripture as if they had begotten them. Ruth bears a child; Naomi raises him; tradition can name nurture as parenthood.

Household, not blood alone. Genesis 17's covenant sign extends to those "homeborn or bought"—a troubling social structure, but one that makes household membership rather than genetic descent the operative category.

Three parents. Period. Melissa B. Simon applies non-biological prooftexts to queer family: "Our daughter doesn't have two 'real' parents and a stepparent. She has two dads and a mom."

Covenant makes identity. Sai Koros observes that through *brit*, Abram becomes Abraham, then asks: what promises, responsibilities, and blessings make queer relationships and communities sacred?

The circle widens. "All the families of the earth" are to be blessed through Abraham (12:3), while Ishmael is blessed in 17:20. Chosenness here can be responsibility, not superiority.

Keshet: Celebrate Your Gay Family · **Sefaria Voices: Queer Covenants**

08 · DISCUSS

Questions that keep the text open

Eight prompts for paired study, full-group conversation, or personal reflection.

01

Go for yourself

What places, roles, expectations, or versions of yourself have you had to leave? What did leaving cost, and what did it make possible?

02

Chosen names

What does it mean for a name to be affirmed rather than merely tolerated? What future can a name hold?

03

Gender-variant ancestors

How does imagining the first Jewish ancestors as *tumtumin* change the founding story? What might the rabbis' matter-of-factness teach us?

04

Covenant in the body

What does it mean to carry covenant in a body? Where do you carry your own commitments—in flesh, habit, memory, or relationship?

05

06

Hagar names God

Who remains unseen in our communities? What changes when the unseen get to name God back?

Whose family counts?

How can we celebrate queer family-building while honoring Hagar's warning about consent, labor, and power?

07

What makes a bond sacred?

Beyond marriage, what covenants do we make with partners, friends, elders, and chosen family? What responsibilities make them durable?

08

Ha'ivri—the other

When have you stood on the other side? What did it cost, and what did it make possible that belonging never could?

A 75-minute study path

10 min Read Genesis 12:1 and name a departure.	**15 min** Study “go toward yourself” in paired lenses.	**15 min** Names and Yevamot 64b.	**15 min** Choose: body/ covenant or Hagar.	**20 min** Discussion, personal covenant, closing word.

09 · REUSE

The weekly research route

Five recurring stops, each with a distinct role. The goal is not forced agreement but an honest, sourced conversation among them.

Hebcal

Confirm portion, verses, reading date, and haftarah.

Portion calendar

Sefaria

Read the bilingual text, classical commentaries, and community source sheets.

Open Sefaria

Chabad.org

Establish the traditional commentary baseline: text, Rashi, and Chassidic readings.

Weekly Torah

Reform Judaism

Gather contemporary Reform commentary and its ethical framing.

Lech L'cha hub

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Open questions from this research

- The author of the 2009 *Torah Queeries* Lech-Lecha chapter could not be identified from the available sources; do not attach a name to it.
- No Lech-Lecha-specific commentary by Dr. Jay Michaelson, Rabbi Steven Greenberg, or Eshel was found.
- No specifically queer-Jewish Hagar commentary was found; this guide labels its queer Hagar applications as study-leader extensions.

- Several Keshet, Sefaria, and Reform pages were verified in the research via detailed search-index snippets because full page reads were unavailable during that pass.

Selected source shelf

1. David Katzenelson, “Extinguishing the Flames”
2. Keshet, “Walk Towards Yourself”
3. Rabbi James Greene, “The Unknown Path”
4. Melissa B. Simon, “Celebrate Your Gay Family”
5. Sai Koros, “Queer Covenants”
6. “Toldot Trans” source sheet
7. “Six Sexes of the Talmud” source sheet
8. BCC, “Waiting for that Promised Freedom”
9. Reform Judaism, “Change of Name: Change of Status”
10. SVARA Trans Halakha Project, Carruthers teshuva
11. SVARA Trans Halakha Project, Solomon teshuva
12. TheTorah.com, “Reconciling Hagar and Sarah”
13. Rabbi Rachel Greengrass on reproductive autonomy
14. Lisa Huberman, “Parshat Lech Lecha, 5781”

Prepared from web research completed in October 2026. Interpretive claims are labeled as traditional, modern queer reclamation, or study-leader extension.

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