

PARSHAT LECH LECHA
GENESIS 12:1-17:27
HAFTARAH ISAIAH 40:27-41:16
8 CHESHVAN 5786/30 OCTOBER 2025



Pine Trees
Hasegawa Tōhaku

AN EMPTINESS FULL OF POSSIBILITIES

1. God said to Abram... (Genesis 12:1)
2. Rabbi Pinchas taught in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: The Torah which the Holy Blessed One gave to Moses was white fire inscribed with black fire; fire mixed with fire, cleaved from fire and given from/by fire, as it is written “From God’s right a fiery law to them” (Deuteronomy 33:2). [Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim]
3. Torah “was written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire.” It was in a form that the writing was contiguous without break of words which made it possible to be read by way of Divine Names and also by way of normal reading which makes explicit the Torah and its commandment. (Ramban)
4. When we think about a Torah scroll, we usually only consider the letters themselves, written in black ink. Yet, the Talmud (Menachot 29a) rules that every letter in a Torah scroll must be completely surrounded by parchment. The white parchment around the letters is an integral part of the Torah; without it, the Torah scroll is disqualified. In fact, the white space is a higher form of Torah. It is analogous to the white fire of Sinai – a sublime, hidden Torah that cannot be read in the usual manner. (Rav Kook)

5. On the simplest level, black fire refers to the letters of Torah, the actual words, which are written in the scroll. The white refers to the spaces between the letters. Together the black letters and white spaces between them constitute the "whole" of the Torah. On another level, the black fire represents the p'shat, the literal meaning of the text. The rabbis point to the importance of p'shat when stating "the text cannot be taken out of its literal meaning." The white fire, however, represents ideas that go beyond the p'shat. It refers to ideas that we bring into the text when we interact with it.... The black letters are limited, limiting and fixed. The white spaces catapult us into the realm of the limitless and the ever-changing, ever-growing. They are the story, the song, the silence. (Rabbi Avi Weiss)

6. Wherever I am
I am what is missing.
When I walk
I part the air
and always
the air moves in
to fill the spaces
where my body's been. (Mark Strand, "Keeping Things Whole")

7. Walls and doors form the house, but the empty space within them is the essence of the house. (Lao Tzu)

8. "...to the land I will show you." (Genesis 12:1)
Where I shall make you visible, where your potential being will be realized in multiform and unpredictable ways. (Sefat Emet)