

## Facilitator Notes for *Lech Lecha*

- People's names, bodies and relationships change profoundly to signal transformation and covenantal belonging
- *Lech lecha* means 'go to yourself' – implies change and risk, a simultaneous movement from one figurative place to another, as well as a metaphorical homecoming.
- Abram risks everything to travel to an unfamiliar place to uncertainty.
- Abram's wife, Sarai, also puts herself at risk – to pass as Abram's sister – as a way to prevent potential violence against them during their sojourns in a new place.
  - In the process Sarai is outed in Egypt. They are cast out of Egypt, prompting another journey back to Canaan.
  - How many LGBT people have left their homes for uncertain journeys, to set off in search of new selves and communities?
  - How many have broken their past or have experienced painful brokenness of families of origin?
- They forged a new way of being at home in the world. They took enormous risk in order to fully 'go to themselves' and create new ways of being at home in the world.
- Covenant in *lech lecha* is marked not just by physical and spiritual journeys also by physical changes to the body.
  - Sarai creatively, if problematically, solves her infertility challenges by asking her servant, Hagar to act as a surrogate. Only after much anguish, jealousy, and triangulated hardships with Hagar and Abram is Sarai able to have a child and create another generation.
  - Circumcision.
- The most public covenant marked by a transformation takes place when the divine changes people's name: Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. In these acts in renaming the divine culturally and linguistically calls out creating a new covenantal tool with two people – now figuratively reborn.
- Both names had a letter '*Hay*' added to it and the '*Hay*' represent God's name and it means their change has a sacred connection to God.
- Changing names is spiritual and physical transformation. Trans people often mark their own journeys by changing names.
- For queer Jews, social change and ritual or spiritual practices are not mutually exclusive; nor do they exist in a political vacuum. Abram and Sarai's covenant with God, which both changed society by launching monotheism and began a historical narrative that climaxed at Sinai and fostered new forms of spiritual and ritual practice. Jews often change covenants to acknowledge new ways of creating covenantal relationships.