

Parshat Vayera: On Rising Early in the Morning Rabbanit Michal Kohane Class of 2020

In the beautiful Lecha Dodi" *piyut* (poem), we say the famous line -"the end of a deed - should be harboured in its beginning", meaning we should be thoughtful in our actions and consider possible outcomes when we start. Just like how Hashem knew He'd create Shabbat, the crown of creation and everything prior to Shabbat, was put in place for Shabbat's glory.

The value of doing things with thoughtfulness and consideration has entered our life far beyond Lecha Dodi, and it's not only "ours": in Arabic there is a similar idiom: *el-ajl min al-shaytan* – haste is of the devil.

In light of this, Avraham getting up "early in the morning" not once, but twice, in order to do something potentially harmful to both his sons, seems especially troublesome:

Genesis 21:14

14 And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away; and she departed, and strayed in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

יד וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח-לֶחֶם וְחֶמֶת מַיִם וַיִּתֵּן אֶל-הַגֵּר שָׁם עַל-שִׁכְמָהּ, וְאֶת-הַיֶּלֶד--וַיְשַׁלְחֶהָ; וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתִּתַּע, בְּמִדְבַר בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע.

Genesis 22:3

3 And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

ג וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר, וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת-חֲמֹרוֹ, וַיִּקַּח אֶת-שְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו אִתּוֹ, וְאֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ; וַיִּבְקַע, עֲצֵי עֵלֶה, וַיִּקַּח וַיֵּלֶךְ, אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-אָמַר-לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים.

Fearing for Avraham's good reputation, I was glad to find another "vayashkem" - and he rose early. In chapter 19:27-28 we read:

Genesis 22:3

27 And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD. **28** And he looked out toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the Plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace.

כח וַיִּשְׁקָף, עַל-פְּנֵי סוּדֹם וְעִמּוֹרָה, וְעַל-כָּל-פְּנֵי, אֶרֶץ הַכְּכָר; וַיֵּרָא, וְהִנֵּה עֵלֶה קִיטֵר הָאֶרֶץ קָקִיטֵר הַכְּבָשָׁן.

כז וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם, בַּבֹּקֶר: אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם--אֲשֶׁר-עָמַד שָׁם, אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה.

In this case, Avraham got up early in the morning to go to the place where he had last spoken with Hashem regarding Sodom and Gamora. After pleading with Hashem to save the cities, he now stands overlooking the

region which has been destroyed. There is nothing but “the smoke of a furnace”, a description that especially in our own post holocaust memory, might be even more eerie.
How do these three “early mornings” tie together and teach us, maybe even inspire us, today?

Avraham traditionally is associated with both the quality of *chesed*- kindness, and with *Tefilat Shacharit*, the Morning Prayer, exactly because of his notorious early rising. But why is *chesed* associated with the morning?

Our tradition tells us that when we wake up, we meet God's in His kindness. Simply because we are alive. The moment we open our eyes, we have been given a gift: life, and the potential of another day when we can partner with Hashem to better the world.

This idea is expressed in *mode / moda ani* – literally – “thankful I am”, for thankfulness is a prerequisite to be a fully present “I”. We are also known as *Yehudim*, from Yehuda, Judah, Jacob's son, whose name comes from – and teaches - thankfulness, *hodaya*. Gratitude is the foundation of who we are, and therefore, of each and every one of our days. The Midrash Rabba 55:8 also points to Avraham getting up early to saddle his donkey. Didn't he have servants? But his love moved him to do it himself. Rav Hirsch adds another dimension to the word “*vayashkem*”. He points out that the root is *shechem* - shoulder. Avraham is taking on additional responsibilities, exemplifying the quality of *chesed* by going above and beyond.

But, on these three occasions when Avraham gets up early, he discovers, to his horror, that Someone has tampered with his morning kindness. On these mornings, God's kindness is not at all obvious. God appears as the destroyer, not the giver or sustainer. First, a whole region is wiped out. Then his first born son is sent away and now the younger one, who should be the true heir, has to be bound up on the altar as a burnt offering.

Avraham on these mornings gets up because a “*berur*” – an inquiry - with God is required. Things are not as they “should be” and he needs to figure them out, *vis a vie* himself, and *vis a vie* the Divine. These are times when he is called to meet God in the absence of kindness and there, seek Him out.

As Elie Wiesel said, “A Jew may be angry at God but a Jew should not ignore God”. For Avraham, reestablishing his relationship with Hashem, is the first thing to do in the morning, and it's even more urgent *davka* (especially) when that relationship is not readily available to him. This also might help explain why the Binding of Isaac is considered Avraham's “*nisayon*” – test rather than Isaac's. Shouldn't it have been Isaac's, giving up his life for Hashem? But, as we learn from Genesis 22:2, it is Avraham's. Maybe it is easier to find God in the qualities associated with Isaac of *din* and *gevura* – judgment and might – in the world, rather than that of *chesed*-kindness, Avraham leaves us with the message that every morning we should hasten to engage with Hashem, so we can, together, seek, introduce and share kindness in the world.



Now back in Israel where she grew up, Rabbanit Michal Kohane continues to be a teacher of Torah and Talmud in Israel and abroad, while completing her chaplaincy certification. Prior to that, she was a long-time leader and educator in Northern California, serving as rabbi, Federation executive director and more. Most recently she was the Rosh Kehila of the Prospect Heights Shul in Brooklyn. Rabbanit Michal holds a BA in Studies of Israel and Education, an MS in Jewish Studies, an MA in Clinical Psychology, and holds a PsyD in organizational psychology. Rabbanit Michal's first novel, Hachug ("Extracurricular") was published in Israel by Steimatzky and she writes a weekly Torah blog which can be found at www.miko284.com