

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash
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PARASHAT HASHAVUA

This year's Parashat HaShavua series is dedicated
in loving memory of Dov Ber ben Yitzchak Sank z"l.

PARASHAT VAYERA

Abraham Established the Morning Prayer
By Rav Yair Kahn

1. The Knight of Faith

In [last week's shiur](#), we focused on Abraham's ethical sensitivity. However, what made Abraham unique was that he combined morality with religious devotion. Therefore, as a complement to [last week's shiur](#), we will concentrate on Abraham's religious commitment and devotion. Of course, the most obvious example is the *akeida*, in which Abraham, in a profound act of faith, is asked to sacrifice not only his son, but his moral teachings as well. I prefer, however, a less obvious and probably less known example.

2. Our Forefathers Established Prayer

After Sodom and Amora were destroyed, Abraham woke up and returned to the spot where he had argued and appealed to Hashem on behalf of the people of Sodom the previous day. He gazed at the valley that was once a populated metropolis and saw thick smoke rising from the land, like the smoke of a furnace. How did Abraham feel? The Torah is silent. According to our Sages, Abraham prayed. In fact, it was at this point that the morning service was established. This *shiur* will discuss how *Chazal* reached this conclusion and what its significance is. We will try to discover the rabbinic narrative of this passage and show how it can be woven into the Biblical account.

Abraham established the morning service, as it says, "And Abraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood (*amad*)," and to stand (*amida*) in this verse refers to nothing but prayer, as it is stated, "And Pinchas stood and he prayed." Yitzchak established the afternoon service, as it says, "And Yitzchak went out to speak (*lasuach*) in the field as the evening approached," and speech (*sicha*) in this verse refers to nothing but prayer, as it is stated, "A prayer of the afflicted as he grows faint and before Hashem he pours his discourse (*sicho*)." Yaakov established the evening service, as it says: "*Va-yifga* at the place and he rested there," and the term "*pegiya*" in this verse refers to nothing but prayer, as it is stated, "And you, do not pray for this nation and do not raise a cry or prayer on their behalf, and do not entreat (*tifga*) me." (*Berakhot* 26b).

This *baraita*, which attributes the various prayer services to our fore-fathers, is difficult in general, but it is

especially troublesome in the case of Abraham. The general difficulty involves the verses that our Sages used as their sources - they derived the various prayers from terms that do not necessarily refer to prayer, supporting their position by quoting additional verses that happen to use those words in reference to prayer. For instance, the term (*amad*), which means "stood," is mentioned regarding Abraham, while there is a verse in *Tehillim* in which this term is associated with prayer. Why did our sages use vague and inconclusive references? After all, there are numerous examples where this term means to literally stand and does not refer to prayer. Are there no explicit examples where Abraham prayed? Didn't he plead with Hashem not to destroy Sodom? Didn't Yitzchak join Rivka in praying for children? Didn't Yaakov appeal to Hashem on his way to the house of Lavan and when he felt threatened by Esav? It is true that using these specific examples may lead to different conclusions regarding which prayer each of our forefathers established. For instance, Abraham prayed to save Sodom in the afternoon, while Yaakov prayed on his way to the house of Lavan in the morning. Nevertheless, the explicit sources provide a more solid foundation for the institution of prayer that is rooted deeply in the Torah.

Moreover, even if we accept that Abraham prayed in the morning, why do our Sages claim that he established the Morning Prayer? Since it is clear that he prayed in the afternoon as well, why didn't they also attribute the afternoon service to him? It is obvious that our Sages connected Abraham specifically to the morning service because the religious word of Abraham is in some way connected specifically to that prayer. The same is true of Yitzchak and Yaakov and the prayers that *Chazal* attributed to them. However, I believe there is an additional and very basic reason why *Chazal* did not consider the alternative prayers mentioned above. Let's take a look at one more difficulty before suggesting a solution.

There is a much more serious problem with the Abraham source. *Chazal* claim that Abraham established the morning service from the verse, "And Abraham arose in the morning to the place in which he stood (*amad*)." The *pasuk* uses the term (*amad*), which refers to prayer in the past tense. In other words, Abraham woke up early in the morning and returned to the same place where he had prayed the previous afternoon, when he pleaded for Sodom. As I mentioned in the introduction to this *shiur*, there is no indication whatsoever that he prayed that morning, or any morning for that matter. How could our Sages possibly derive that Abraham established the morning service from this verse?

3. Two Types of Prayer

In order to understand this *beraita*, we must distinguish between two separate types of prayer. One form of prayer is the daily prayer, which, according to the Rambam, is a Biblical obligation derived from the verse, "And to worship Him with all your heart" (*Devarim* 11:13). The second form of prayer is derived from the verse, "And shall you come to war in your land against an oppressor who attacks you and you shall sound the trumpets and shall be remembered before Hashem

your God and you shall be saved from your enemies” (*Bamidbar* 10:9). From here, the Rambam in *Hilkhot Ta’anit* learns that there is an independent obligation to cry out to Hashem when calamity strikes, God forbid. The Rambam notes that the obligation to call out to Hashem in times of distress is rooted in the awareness that it is Hashem who brought the disaster upon us, and therefore salvation can be achieved by crying out to Hashem and repenting. In contrast, the requirement of daily prayer is an act of worship. It is a constant obligation, not generated by or limited to need.

According to one source, the schedule of daily prayer parallels the daily sacrifices brought in the *Mikdash*. Just as we worship Hashem through sacrifice, we worship Hashem with our lips. Even though the middle section of the silent prayer expresses a series of needs (give us wisdom, forgive us, heal us, etc.), within the context of daily service, it should be viewed as an expression of our absolute dependence upon Hashem. By reflecting on our dependence, we show our subservience to Hashem, our master.

When our Sages stated that the forefathers established the daily prayer service, they were clearly referring to prayer as an act of worship. This would, by definition, exclude the prayers that were primarily needs-based. Such *tefillot* are generated by necessity and the specific time of day is absolutely irrelevant. Thus, *Chazal* could not consider Avraham pleading for Sedom, Yitzchak crying for children, or Yaakov praying to be saved from Lavan or Esav as prototypes. We are left with subtle references, which our Sages interpreted to be referring to prayer.

4. Establishing a set place of prayer

However, we are still puzzled by the source used to indicate that Avraham established the morning service. As we mentioned, the prayer term used in that verse is in past tense and is a reference to the previous day, when Avraham prayed for the survival of Sedom. How did the Rabbis derive that Avraham prayed in the morning from this verse?

I think we can answer this question if we consider an additional rabbinic source. The *gemara* in *Berakhot* (6b) teaches:

R. Chelbo said in the name of R. Huna: Anyone who establishes a set place for his prayer, may the God of Avraham help him. And when he dies they should say about him, “Woe for the loss of a humble person, woe for the loss of a devout person, one of the disciples of Avraham our father.” And how do we know that Avraham assigned a place? It is stated, “And Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood.” And standing in this verse is referring to nothing other than prayer, as it says, ‘And Pinchas got up and prayed.

At first glance, this *gemara* is very difficult. The *gemara* uses superlatives to describe one who assigns a place to pray. He is devout, humble, and a disciple of Avraham. What is so impressive about establishing a set place of prayer? It is quite obvious that we are dealing with a deep religious act; however, it is not immediately obvious what the spiritual meaning of assigning a place to pray is.

It is important to note that according our Sages, the reason Avraham returned the morning after he pleaded to Hashem on behalf of Sedom to that very same location that he had designated as a place of prayer was in order to pray again. In other words, the assertion made by our Sages that Avraham established a set place for prayer enables them to conclude that Avraham prayed that morning. The past tense of the verse indeed is a reference to yesterday’s prayer. But why did Avraham go to that very same spot? What was the significance of standing on that very soil where he had offered his appeal to the Almighty? Our Sages believed that he returned there in order to pray once again. We have thus solved one of our problems - we now understand how *Chazal* derived from this verse that Avraham established the morning service.

By placing the source of the law to establish a set location for prayer in its original Biblical context, perhaps we can decipher its spiritual significance as well. Avraham was told of the impending destruction of Sedom and Amora. Avraham was aware of how corrupt Sedom and Amora, as evidenced by his refusal to benefit whatsoever from their property after he defeated the four kings (14:22-23). Nevertheless, he was distraught by the prospect of the deaths of the entire population - men, women, and children. He appealed to Hashem to have them spared. He debated and bargained. Perhaps, he argued, the corruption is not total. Maybe there are a few righteous people in the city. Perhaps there is still hope for some of the people to repent. He pushed his arguments to the limit and then went home.

The next morning, Avraham arose early, eager to see whether his pleas had succeeded in changing the decree of destruction. He returned to the spot at which he had engaged the Almighty. He gazed towards Sedom and was greeted by horrific sight, a sight of death and destruction. What was once a bustling metropolis was turned into a pile of ash. In spite of all of Avraham’s pleas and petitions, Sedom was destroyed. He woke up the next morning and saw that the smoke arising from the land was like the smoke of a furnace.

How did Avraham react? Was he angry? Did he scream at God and charge Him with injustice? Or did he accept the inscrutable will of God with humility, but felt nonetheless that all his unanswered prayers were pointless? According to our Rabbis, Avraham chose a third approach. He prayed. In his humility, he recognized that although Hashem is not bound to answer all our prayers, He nevertheless listens. With profound devotion, he understood that we pray not only out of need, expecting Hashem to respond, but also as a meaningful act of worship.

Assigning a set place of prayer refers to a fixed geographic location, but it is meant to express religious and spiritual constancy. Every day, we return to our set place of prayer. We pray three times a day, whether the previous day’s prayer was answered or whether it was rejected. With humility, we accept the divine will. Full of devotion, we continue to worship Hashem. One who spiritually and religiously establishes a set place to pray is truly humble, devout, and a disciple of Avraham.

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