

Shabbat Shalom.

I've had a love-hate relationship with this time in the Jewish calendar since I was a little girl: Starting with the Torah and Haftarah readings during the Yamim Nora'im, I loved the way God answered the prayers of women who were childless. As an adult, I was also childless, and during all those years of infertility and miscarriages, I wondered why God didn't answer MY prayers. The self-doubt this created was dreadful.

When I was a girl, on our walk to shul, my dad, z"l, would teach us Torah. In Vayeira, God answers Sarah's plea to bear a child. But then, when we came to the Akeidah, which we read about during the Yamim Nora'im, not so long ago, and then again today. "What kind of loving God would ask such a thing of someone?", or something like that, I remember asking my father as we walked to shul. He provided me with the spoiler alert, letting me know that Avraham didn't *really* sacrifice Yitzchak, but also saying something like, "We can't always understand the ways of HaShem Yisborach."

Last night we had dinner with our unrelated Rosenblum family, Eric, his son Sam [we've always thought of Sam as our "God-son," because Rom, z"l, was Sandak at Sam's Brit Milah], and Sam's wife Enfel. I was talking with Eric about this drasha, and he taught me something he remembered from studying Nechamah Leibowitz. I'm doing this from memory, so I hope I get it right. Nechamah Leibowitz taught that in Lech Lecha, when haShem tells Avraham,

לך-לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך. ואעשה לגוי גדול
ואברכך ואגדלה שמך והיה ברכה.

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy birthplace, and from thy father's house, unto the land I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing" Here, God is **commanding** Avraham to leave his past.

Still in that Parasha, Sarah, who was barren, gave her handmaid Hagar to Avraham, that Hagar should bear a son in Sarah's name. No doubt the precursor to our modern day dystopic "The Handmaids' Tale." We read that Sarah then dealt harshly with Hagar – my first taste in the Torah of a woman being harsh with another woman, and I didn't like it.

In this parasha, when Sarah sees Yishma'el "m'tzachek" – my old Hertz chumash translates that as "making sport." - it could mean, "making others laugh," she tells Avraham to send Hagar and her son, who up until the birth of Yitzchak one could think of as Sarah's adopted son, out into the desert. As a child, I didn't have any idea of the vastness and emptiness of that desert. It's hard-scrabble, with barely a bush in site. But no matter how you envision that emptiness, how can we think of our fore-mother Sarah as being so cruel?

I recently re-read The Red Tent, subtitled: The Oldest Love Story Never Told. In this historical novel, Jacob's wives and concubines, Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilhah, even though they have sometimes strong difficult feelings about one another, all get along, take care of each other and each other's children. These women are just two generations removed from Sarah and Hagar ... I realize that this is a novel, but why couldn't Sarah have been more like these women?

Back to my questions about the Akeidah. Remember, God had told Avraham that he would make of him a great nation. With the banishment of Hagar, God told Avraham that he would make a great nation of Yishma'el as well. A *different* nation. The only future nation of Avraham therefore has to come from Yitzchak. But in *asking*

Avraham to offer Yitzchak as a burnt-offering, Nechamah Leibowitz teaches, God is asking of Avraham to sacrifice his future.

Avraham has left his past behind, and now God is asking him to sacrifice his future. So what is left? I like to think of the Torah as both our history, and our guide for how to be in this world. One answer to “What is left?” is that we be *present* in our relationship to God, to that which we can’t understand, and in our relationships with others and with ourselves.

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