

“The Hardest Moment”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

One of the most difficult and powerful passages in the Bible is the story of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac. On God’s command, Abraham takes his son up to the top of the mountain, binds him on the altar, and, only at the last instant through the intervention of an angel, sacrifices a ram.

Countless discussions and interpretations of this story have been offered. The Kotzker Rebbe asks an important question of his students: What moment of the entire ordeal was most difficult for Abraham? You might wish to answer for yourself before reading the Kotzker’s conclusion.

His response: The most difficult moment was coming down the mountain.

In our lives we are often called to take some momentary, decisive action. Whatever we do in that moment we must live with for the rest of our lives. The hardest part of Yom Kippur is six months later, when we have to fulfill or disregard the promises we have made. The hardest part of the wedding ceremony is the time to come when our commitment is tested.

For each day that followed, throughout the years he was yet to live, Abraham must have reflected on those events at the top of the mountain. Although we do not know if he looked back with sadness, pride, regret, anger, love, or a combination of all that and more, surely living with his choice each day was in some significant way harder than making it.

Judaism is a tradition of dailyness. It puts its emphasis not on the rare, unrepeated action, but on the constant, serious, aware, and intensive business of living. So it was with Abraham. So it is with us.