

Shofar: A Twisted Commemoration of a Disturbing Encounter (RH Day 2)

We attach mitzvot to events in our history, there are so many mitzvot that are meant to reflect and encourage the awareness of transformative moments in Jewish history.

Major events in Jewish history don't just have holidays. They have enactments. We enact yetziat mitzraim with the seder. We dwell in a sukkah on sukkot. We're not so proud of our behavior at sinai, so we m'takein – improve upon it - by staying up all night. We even enact the forgiveness for the egel by not eating on Yom Kippur, and we enact the way in which our lives hang in the balance by casting lots over goats (in the mikdash) on Yom Kippur.

Rosh Hashana has a good story associated with it. The akeidah would make for some really interesting mitzvah enactments. *Imagine the yom tov meal: the most beloved child would be made to lie down on the table?! Tie them to the challah board!*

Q) What do we do to commemorate the akeidah? A) Shofar.

Why shofar? It's so ancillary to the story? The story is about the tension between the love of a father and religious devotion. The shofar is literally an afterthought.

We could get up early. We could pack a satchel (we do it on sukkot to symbolize the harvest!). We could do something to commemorate submission or overcoming our limited capacity to determine what is right and good, like where a giant yarmulke or walk around hakafot style with our hands covering our eyes or something like that...

Instead, the symbol we use to commemorate - the symbol of the part of the story we are meant to internalize, recall and relive - is the shofar. Let's look closer at the role shofar plays in the story...

וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִצְחָק וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַמֶּאֱכָלֶת לְשַׁחֵט אֶת־בְּנוֹ:

יא וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מִלְאָךְ ה' מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶל־תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנֶּעֱר וְאֶל־תַּעֲשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יִרְא אֱלֹקִים
אֶתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יַחֲזִיקְךָ מִמֶּנִּי:

יג וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אֵיל אַחַר נֶאֱחָז בַּסֶּבֶךְ בְּקִרְוָיו וַיִּלָּךְ
אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַּחַת בְּנוֹ:

יד וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא ה' יִרְאָה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמֶר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר ה' יִרְאָה:
טו וַיִּקְרָא מִלְאָךְ ה' אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שְׁנֵית מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־ה' כִּי
יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יַחֲזִיקְךָ: כִּי־בָרַךְ אַבְרָהָם
וְהִרְבָּה אַרְבָּה אֶת־זַרְעוֹ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחֲזוֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל־שָׁפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׂ זַרְעוֹ
אֶת שְׁעַר אֵיבָיו: וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזַרְעוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקִלְי: וַיָּשָׁב
אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נַעֲרָיו וַיִּקְמוּ וַיִּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו אֶל־בְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם בְּבֵאֵר שָׁבַע:

Hashem nor His malach asked Avraham to bring an alternate offering. Avraham is asked to do this horrible thing – murder his beloved child Yitzchak. Hashem says go and after 3 days says do it there. Avraham goes with Yitzchak, ties him up takes the knife is about to slaughter him and an angel yells out – Avraham, Avraham stop! You've passed the test. Avraham's heart is pounding. He's in shock. Yitzchak is speechless, terrified – pachad Yitzchak is the way Yitzchak relates to God for the rest of his life. Yitzchak is still tied up on the alter. No one moves. Avraham lifts his eyes he has to take initiative and look for a way to move forward. After this horrible ordeal, Avraham in essence says 'I understand. I do fear you. You are in charge. You created the universe. It's not just willy-nilly, be a good

person, figure it out. You have expectations. You want specific things. Ok. I get it. You want to know I'll follow you not only when it's in my own self-interest. It's not all fun and games...but I still *want* to do for you. I want to serve you. You didn't ask me to bring an offering. I'm looking for it. May I want you? May I seek to be close to you?'

Hashem doesn't just reply "yes", Hashem says – "silly, why do you think the ram got stuck there?!" I'havdil, "you had me at hello", bi nishbati.

What is the ram caught with?... Its horn. Its shofar! The shofar serves this fascinating function within the story. It holds the ram in the thicket – allowing Avraham the opportunity for initiative.

As such, the shofar is a symbol for both us and Hashem. For us, **the shofar is a symbol of our wanting to serve Hashem.** R' Reuven Taragin explains, the symbol reflects the profound longing in Avraham lifting his eyes and looking for a way to make meaning, to take initiative, to connect with Hashem amidst the awful awkwardness of relief and rejection.

The shofar is also the material that Hashem creates which enables us to reach Him. The shofar is the assurance that Hashem will show us how to connect with Him.

The shofar is the hook, the wink, the thing that shows us Hashem is watching and listening, open and interested in what we want to share with him.

Avraham was not looking to dispense of his obligation. He was taking initiative - looking to achieve a connection.

There are three initiative taking opportunities I'd like to draw your attention to:

#1: *When we ask, let me know if there's anything I can do, we can view ourselves as dispensing our obligation or we can look for ways to help and reach out if we think of something. Better we can ask, "how can I help?"*

If we lift up our eyes and seek ways to connect, we might find that the opportunities are there. If you're not sure who could use a helping hand in the community, lift up your eyes. Look through the membership list, look for someone you don't know or haven't seen in a while and reach out. Or ask someone who you think might know. Text me after yom tov.

When we lift up our eyes, when we look for opportunities to help others we'll find opportunities.

#2: We can also lift up our eyes and seek out Hashem and look to serve Him. The shofar is the promise of a wink, if we pause when we hear the shofar and think of how we can show Hashem it's not just about ticking boxes, it's about a relationship, something will come to mind. A ram will present itself in the thicket, you may have it in mind already and then you have the chance to follow through and bring that ram – that korban – that closeness. In that, we strengthen our bond with each other and with Hashem.

#3: Our akeidah is over. We split from each other, we acted in ways we normally don't, we sacrificed holidays with our family, we prayed in tents, we covered our faces, we didn't shake hands or dance together, almost like aveilut – but instead of 12 months, it was 24 months. But we're back now. COVID still exists, but for almost everyone life has just about gone back to normal. It's now that we need to lift our eyes. See each other. Hug each other, comfort each other, and collectively and individually look for that shofar. Some of our kehilla didn't make it through this machala, that's still painful. I miss Rene, Nechemia ben Avraham Avinu regularly, may his memory be a blessing and an inspiration. Thank God so many of us did survive. Now is the time to look for our shofar. How can we use this experience to better ourselves, to serve Hashem.

Perhaps He wants us to (1) internalize how powerful God is and how utterly vulnerable we are as we seek to harness and control the planet, perhaps it's to (2) retain a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood – that we're all in it together, or perhaps He wants us to (3) look more at our families, to remember to whom we turned when we couldn't engage in society in the same way - the need to have a Shabbos where we disconnect from the constant barrage, a lot of us look back fondly on those first days of the pandemic, when we spent so much more quality time with our loved ones and what we need to do is tap into that perspective and prioritization. With that perspective on prioritization, maybe we can develop some insight into how to withstand the winds of antisemitism and assimilation, in order to engage with and endure this society in which we live as the people chosen by God 3300 years ago to serve Him and serve as an example to humanity.

That can be overwhelming, but it's not on us to do it all. Lo alecha hamelacha ligmor. Hashem has put the ayil in the thicket. The path to make meaning of this complex pain and anxiety is there. We just have to lift up our eyes, seek it and we shall see it.