From the Alter to the Ram (2024)

(Rosh Hashanah)

Just before Rosh Hoshanna the nation was in shock as Iran sent 180 ballistic missiles to every corner of Israel. The whole country was praying to Hashem and then there were again great miracles, like the last time Iran attacked, and most of their missiles were destroyed and no one was hurt. In Tel Aviv however there was a terrorist attack and seven people were killed. I said to someone what an amazing miracle we experienced. He answered, yes but what about the seven people that were killed? Although we have temporarily repelled our outside enemies from Iran we are still suffering from internal enemies that it seems we cannot defeat.

It amazes me that we even survive with so many enemies surrounding us, so many within the body of Israel and so many Jews as well from the mixed multitude that protest and cry for surrender and suicide and seek to undermine the government in whatever way they can. Thank God for the majority of the heroic Jewish people that are more or less united and fighting together to win against so many odds. What is the source of both the curses and blessings that overtake us?

On Rosh Hashanah we read about the remembrance of Sarah, the miraculous birth of Itzchak, the expulsion of Ishmael, the political alliance with Avimelech and the Akeida (the sacrifice of Itzchak). What do these subjects have in common and how are they related to our constant fluctuation between blessing and curse? Are blessing and curse random or do we have some choice in the judgements and destinies decreed each Rosh Hashanah? We are told that teshuva can alter evil decrees. What kind of teshuva however has such a great power that it can change our destiny?

Changing Destiny

I will answer with another question. Avraham spoke with Hashem throughout his life from the first Lech Lecha to the last Lech Lecha. His relationship must have grown closer and more intimate along the way as he grew older and passed through many tests. Why then in this last test did an angel speak to him, instead of Hashem, and tell him not to go through with the Akeida?

I suggest the reason is because according to Rashbam the Akeida was a punishment. After all of his service to Hashem, Avraham was demoted. I suggest that he regained his status and earned a new and greater crown not from the Akeida but from listening to the angel and replacing Itzchak for the ram. Let me explain.

When all the nations came to celebrate the brit of Itzchak it was a tremendous Kiddush Hashem. Who could not marvel at the God of Avraham and the ninety year old Sarah with her new born baby? Itzchak means 'he will laugh'. His name signifies the kind of laughter one makes when they see open miracles. They laugh and say 'how can this be?' Itzchak who is himself the miracle will laugh one day in the form of Israel who in the future will be saved from devastation by open miracles and will laugh and say 'how could this be?" From this tremendous demonstration of the power of the God of Avraham probably came many converts. Many took note of how the God of

Avraham keeps His promises and can transform the nature of the world He created according to His will.

The next subject we read tells us about the expulsion of Ishmael who sought to harm this miraculous child. Avimelech then makes a pact with Avraham ratified with seven sheep and this is what Ramban describes as a sin. Avraham could have said Avimelech we can be friends but I have already made a covenant with the same God that brought me Itzchak. He also promised me this Land so it would be disrespectful to exchange His covenant with the assurances of a mortal king.

As we read in the narrative of the Torah Avraham did indeed agree to make a pact with Avimelech. According to Ramban this angered Hashem and because of this, in the next passage when he tells Avraham to sacrifice Itzchak, it is as if He is saying since you have turned a great Kidush Hashem into a Chillul Hashem, I am now taking my miracles back again. He told Avraham to sacrifice this son.

The consequences of this pact have continued to reverberate throughout Jewish history. I heard from Rav Lenny Goldberg who heard from Rav Kahane in Midrash Raba:

> "G-d said, you gave Avimelech seven sheep, then seven righteous descendants of yours will fall to the Philistines: Hofni, Pinchas, Samson, Saul and his three sons...." and [many] other curses are mentioned.. IN Tana Dibe Eliyahu (Elijah the prophet's commentary when he came to learn with Rav Anan), he says that because of that covenant, we learn that anyone who makes a covenant with a goy is hit with a list of brutal curses (it's at the end of ch. 7). And the Rashbam, if you look at his commentary on the Akeida (which comes right after this episode). Rashbam says, why does the Akeida begin with the words "and it was after these things"" what things? The brit with Avimelech. So the Akeida was a punishment for the covenant with Avimelech because Avraham made a deal on Eretz Philshtim, which is part of Eretz Yisrael, and he had no right to. That's the Rashbam on the words "And it was after these things"...
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> Midrash Raba (Vayikra Raba Ch 54:4)

There is a fascinating Midrash I quoted last week.

> Our sages tell us that on the entire day Abraham bound Isaac, he saw the ram tearing himself free from one thicket and becoming entangled in another. G-d told Abraham: “Thus are your children destined to be caught in iniquities and entangled in misfortunes.”
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> Abraham then turned to G-d and asked, “Master of the World! Will it be like this forever?”
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> G-d replied, “In the end, they will be redeemed by the horns of this very ram, as the verse states, ‘G-d will blow with the shofar and go forth in southern tempests.’” May this be speedily in our days! (Chabbad Online)

I would like to add something else that came to mind based on this Midrash. If we interpret the Akeida as a punishment. Therefore the 'angel' spoke to Avraham instead of Hashem but before that the ram kept distracting Avraham who was sadly committed to sacrificing his son. A number of times he lost his concentration due to this ram until finally it appeared to him that the ram had been sent as a replacement. It seems to me that the greatest test of the Akeida was not to sacrifice his son but 'not' to sacrifice his son and replace him with the ram. How is this a greater test?

As I often say, the Torah is not a history book. Let us juxtapose our modern times with the sin of the Avimelech alliance. In the six day war there was a tremendous Kiddush Hashem. The whole world laughed like Itzchak 'How could this be? A tiny country in six days against so many enemies? It must be the hand of God!' Just like the passages we read on Rosh Hoshannah there is the great miracle, the great laugh of disbelief, Ishmael was running away and then there is the pact, the 'alliance.'

The Alliance

It is the alliance that turns the blessing into a curse. One by one the miracles are taken away and the miracle child becomes himself the sacrifice. The temple fell from Heaven just as Rashi explained, however we did not want it and so we must build it from below as Rambam explains. The whole world witnessed great miracles and the Jewish Nation could have led the world to redemption. Instead however we said it was no miracle. It was our own strength. The rabbis said we are still in Galut and the Temple Mount was forbidden. We made alliances with Gentiles today as our forefathers did in the past.

Avimelech means literally 'the father of the king.' This often describes the manner in which we look up to various protectorate nations like our fathers that are even greater than our King. We are proud of Hashem our King but many don't truly believe He can protect us. So many of us feel America is even more powerful than our King. Without the support of America we are lost. He is like the father of our King that gives us permission to serve our King. There is no excitement greater than the face of our politicians when they are shaking the hands of an American president.

As we exchanged our greatness for fear, holiness for betrayal and the miraculous for the mundane, we have sunk lower and lower to the 49th level of tuma just like in Egypt. All that was given to us by Heaven was taken away and frozen due to our actions. We willingly serve the American Pharoah and fear serving Hashem who commands us to settle the Land He has given us without fear. Our betrayal to Hashem and our people, leads to more betrayal and now is leading to sanctions and more sanctions until we become completely enslaved or completely free.

The Turning Point

After Oct 7 however our slavery began to end as we had no choice but to end it in order to survive. We are now building our own weapons and due to our increasing isolation we are forced to increase our faith, resilience and resourcefulness. We are forced to unite in order to save the collective Jewish people despite our differences. We have woken up from the global fantasy to

discover we are still the Jew and forced by Hashem to do everything possible to survive. And by our isolated survival glory is forced upon the reluctant conquerors of Israel.

The Shofar

The sin of the seven sheep and the shofar that Rav Kahane blew to distract us from sacrificing another Itzchak and another Itzchak we are reminded of in the blessing repeated seven times before blowing the shofar. It is as if this blessing is reminding us of the solution and the teshuva that can dramatically change our destiny. It is the shofar that says take me, the shofar and not another Itzchak. It is the shofar that says this is the alliance and no other. It is the shofar that says settle and claim our land and build our Temple so that instead of another Itzchak we will bring animal sacrifices. It is the shofar that tells us to exchange our fear of the unknown blast of destiny when we rely on mortal kings, to the revealed path of glory and compassion that our Father desires to show us. Finally it is the shofar that transforms judgment into chesed by the actions of charity prayer and serious teshuva.

On both days of Rosh Hoshannah at exactly this sevenfold prayer that is repeated before the shofar our congregation shuddered. Just over the hill in the area of Tzvat and Katzrin we heard the booms of incoming missiles. Both days precisely at this time when we ask that judgment be sweetened with mercy before the shofar of destiny, the drums of judgment exploded by our minyan. We prayed under an outdoor canopy in the hills above Teveria and looked nervously at each other as we heard the sounds of din exploding from the iron dome above us.

When we demonstrate true faith by expelling our internal enemies claiming our land and Temple. Then instead of seven lives being taken by disgusting beasts, multitudes of sacrifices will be offered instead and there will be peace within our nation as well as an army of angels protecting us from outside our borders.

To underscore what I have written above there are two passages that share the same gematria (327). One is *'Ayeh Ha Sa'*? (Itzchak asks Where is the sheep for the sacrifice?) And then '*Vayera Hene Ayil*' (Behold there was a ram.) Both gematrias can be counted as 327 which is the gematria for Meir Kahane. Rabbi Kahane was the sacrifice as well as the tikkun. He gave his life to awaken us through the shofar he blew. Even after he was sacrificed because of our sins of indifference and animosity to the authentic Torah he brought down into the world his voice still rings true.

The ram still struggles in the bushes and says 'no, not another Itzchak.' There is a greater test than sacrificing your children. Stop sacrificing them due to your concern over our enemies and allies. Throw out our enemies within. Defeat our enemies that surround us with crushing blows regardless of civilians who also support them and hand out candies when Jews are murdered. The true test of our alliance with Hashem is a much greater test and much easier test if we have the will to do it. He is taking many of the choices away in order to train us so that we can stand alone but with our true Father in glory and tremendous light for ourselves and the world.

Har Habayit

My volunteer service this year during the war was to increase the minyan each week on the Har Habayit. I have witnessed after Tisha B'Av how we now prostrate freely without police persecution, arrests and banning of prayer. In the beginning of the year it was hard sometimes to get a minyan but today the minyan's are increasing regularly. The visits to Har Habayit this year are more than all the visits since 1967. I am certain this has definitely made an influence in Heaven and assisted in this war.

In this 76th year of the modern State of Israel (76=Gematria 'Kahane') may we finally mature in faith and understanding. May we gain courage and may Hashem strengthen us and guide us and protect us. This week the judges in Tel Aviv ruled that there will be a public Yom Kippur and it will be forbidden to do the provocation that was done last year [The last spiritual straw of last year before the parading of Torahs was exchanged for parading our women, children and elderly in Gaza - see Bereshit]. This is a great sign that our nation is licking its wounds and growing and learning how we arrived here and how we can climb out and above from so many troubles we had brought upon ourselves from our unforgiving animosity towards each other. May Am Israel be inscribed and sealed in this year for life and great blessing for each and every one.

May the Lech Lecha to Israel not be transformed to the Lech Lecha to Mount Moriah. May the God of judgment that sends Avraham to the Akeida become Hashem Yireh (God of Mercy) at the end of the story. May we learn to swim on our own and save not only ourselves but the entire Creation that Hashem entrusted to Adam. May we rise to become Adam as we have been contracted to be. May we learn from the past that our destiny is to a large degree in our hands. May we see vengeance and eradication of our enemies so there can be true peace with victory. May we see great miracles surrounding our Nation and within our Nation so that we walk freely and settle the Holy Land without fear of attacks. May we make Hashem's name great so that He can make our name great and protect us. May the whole world see this glory and come from all corners with their guilt offerings and thanksgiving offerings for our newly rebuilt Temple. May it truly be so this year.

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