

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XXXI: Emor (Lev. 21:1–24:23)

### Essay 16. The miracle of the ram

**מדרש** רבה "בחדש השביעי באחד לחדש" וכו', "באחד לחדש" זה אברהם שנאמר "אחד היה אברהם", "זכרון תרועה" זה יצחק שנאמר "וישא אברהם את-עיניו וירא והנה-איל", "מקרא-קדש" זה יעקב שנאמר וכו' עכ"ל.

There is a **Midrash Rabbah**:

**“In the seventh month, on the first of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a memorial of sounding [the shofar], a sacred occasion.”**<sup>1</sup>

**“On the first [באחד] [be’echad],” this is Abraham, as it is stated: Abraham was but one [אחד] [echad].”**<sup>2</sup>

**“A memorial of sounding [the shofar],” this is Isaac, as it is stated: “And Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns; so Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.”**<sup>3</sup>

**“A sacred occasion [מקרא] [mikra],” this is Jacob, as it is stated: “Listen to Me Jacob, Israel who was called by Me [מקראי] [mekora’i].”**<sup>4</sup>

- Lev. Rabbah 29:7

ומתחלה יש לדקדק על פשט הכתוב "זכרון תרועה", דבשלמא אם בעקידת יצחק היתה שם תרועה הוה ניחא לומר שזאת התרועה היא לזכר אותה התרועה. אבל עתה שהענין הוא שזאת התרועה שאנו עושים היא מזכרת זכות עקידת יצחק, אם כן הוה לו לומר "תרועת זכרון" ולא "זכרון תרועה".

**Initially, one must check the plain meaning of the verse “a memorial of sounding [the shofar],” for granted, if at the Binding of Isaac there had been a sounding of a shofar, it would be fine to say that this sounding is to remember that sounding.**

**But there was no such sounding then. Now that the matter is such that this sounding that we make is a remembrance of the merit of the Binding of Isaac, if so, it should have said “a [shofar] blowing of remembrance,” and not “a memorial of sounding [the shofar].”**

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<sup>1</sup> Lev. 23:24.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. 33:24.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 22:13.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 48:12.

ועוד קשה על המדרש דמאי דאמר זה יצחק דכתיב "וישא אברהם" וכו' "וינרא והגה-איל" הוא תימה, דמה זכרון שייך בראיית האיל והלא עקר הזכרון הוא "ויצקד את-יצחק בנו" וזה הפסוק היה לו להביא ולא "וינרא והגה-איל", שאף אם לא היה זה האיל כבר אברהם עמד בגיסיון שלו, אבל בהקרבת האיל לא היה שם לא מצוה ולא גיסיון ולא שייך ביה שום זכרון.

**Also, the Midrash is difficult, in that it says, “this is Isaac, as it is stated: ‘And Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a ram.’ ” This is surprising, for what kind of remembrance is relevant with sighting the ram? Isn’t the principal remembrance “and he bound Isaac, his son”<sup>5</sup>? That is the verse that should have been brought, not “and he looked, and behold, a ram.” For even if the ram had not been there, Abraham had already withstood his trial. But in the offering of the ram, there was neither mitzvah nor test, and no remembrance there that is relevant.**

ואם תאמר לפי מה שאמרו במדרש על פסוק "ויצלהו לעלה תחת בנו" שבכל מעשה שהיה עושה באיל היה מתפלל רבון העולם הני רואה דמיו של איל זה כאילו דמו של יצחק בני, אימוריו כאילו אימוריו של יצחק בני, וכו', כאילו הקרבתי את בני וכו'.

**Perhaps you will say, based on what they said in the Midrash on the verse, “he offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son”:**

**That for every action that he did with the ram, he prayed, “Master of the Universe, see the blood of this ram as if it is the blood of Isaac, my son; its fats as though they were the fats of Isaac, my son; etc.; as though I had sacrificed my son, etc.”**

- Gen. Rabbah 56:9

היא גופא משיא דלמה לא התפלל אברהם תפלה זו מיד שעכבוהו מן השמים לשחוט את בנו, הני רואה כאילו הקרבתי את בני. ולמה המתין בשחיטת האיל ובהקרבתו, וכי אם לא היה האיל לא היה עושה תפלה זו, והלא כשעכבוהו מן השמים לשחוט את בנו עדיין לא היה יודע שיזדמן לו האיל, ועוד למה הוצרך להזדמנות זה.

**This itself is difficult, for why didn’t Abraham pray this prayer immediately after being prevented by Heaven from slaughtering his son, i.e., “May it seem as though I had sacrificed my son”?**

**Why did he wait until the slaughtering of the ram and its offering to offer prayers? If the ram had not appeared, would he not have said this prayer, “may it seem as though I had sacrificed my son”? When he was first stopped from slaughtering his son, he did not yet know that the ram would appear.**

**Furthermore, why was this appearance of the ram even necessary?**

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 22:9.

וַיֵּשׁ לומר שְׂבָכָל המצוות יש לנו שני מיני שָׂכָר, אֶחָד עַל הַמַּעֲשֵׂה וְאֶחָד עַל הַמַּחְשְׁבָה, וְהַמַּעֲשֵׂה גָדוֹל כַּחַד לְהַשְׁתִּיק הַמַּקְטָרִגִּים שֶׁהָרִי כָּל הַעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוָה אֶחָד קוֹנֶה לוֹ פְּרִקְלִיט אֶחָד, וְזֶה גוֹרֵם שֶׁאִם הָיָה נִגְזָר עָלָיו הַדִּין, שָׂכָר מִצְוָה זוֹ מַמְתִּיקָתָא אֶת הַדִּין.

**It can be said that for all mitzvot we receive two types of reward: one for the action and one for the thought. The power of the action is great; it silences the accusing forces, as it says: “One who performs one mitzvah acquires for himself one advocate.”<sup>6</sup> This has the effect that if a harsh judgment had been decreed against him, the reward of this mitzvah sweetens the judgment.**

אֲמָנָם הַמַּחְשְׁבָה סֶלֶקָא לְעִילָא וְהוֹפֵךְ הַדִּין לְרַחֲמִים, כְּדֵאִיתָא בְּזוֹהַר, וְכִמּוֹ שֶׁפִּתְבְּנוּ לְעִיל בְּסִמּוּד. אֲמָנָם הַמַּחְשְׁבָה טוֹבָה בְּלֹא מַעֲשֵׂה אִין לֵה פֶחַ לְפַעוֹל בְּזִכּוּתוֹ לְפִי שְׁעָדִין לֹא נִשְׁתַּמֵּךְ הַקְטִיגוֹר, וְכִדְאֻמְרֵינוּ שֶׁאִין נוֹטְלִין שָׂכָר אֶלָּא עַל הַמַּעֲשֵׂה. וּמִטַּעַם זֶה נָתַן לְיִשְׂרָאֵל קוֹדֶם יִצְיָאֲתָן מִמִּצְרַיִם שְׁתֵּי מִצְוֹת שִׁיתַּעֲסֻקוּ בָּהֶן כְּדֵי שִׁיגְאָלוּ.

**However, thought ascends exceedingly high and transforms judgment into mercy, as it is written in the Zohar,<sup>7</sup> and as we wrote above, at the end of Essay 15.**

**Still, good thought without an action lacks the power to act in one’s merit, since the accuser has not yet been silenced. As we say, “One is rewarded only for the deed.”<sup>8</sup> For this reason, before the Israelites left Egypt, they were given two mitzvot to engage in so that they would be redeemed.<sup>9</sup>**

וּמַעֲתָה בְּאַבְרָהָם כְּשֶׁעָפְבוּהוּ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא הָיְתָה מִתְפַּרְסְמָת צִדְקָתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם מִפְּנֵי שְׁנֵי דְבָרִים, הֵדָא שִׁיְהִינָה פִּתְחוֹן פֶּה לְמַדַּת הַדִּין לומר שֶׁאַבְרָהָם לֹא עָמַד בְּנִסְיוֹן שְׁלֹו אֶלָּא שֶׁעָשָׂה אִינָה מוֹם בְּיִצְחָק כְּדֵי שִׁיְהִינָה פְּסוּל לְקַרְבֵּן, וּמִשּׁוֹם הָכִי מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם עָפְבוּהוּ לְשׁוֹחֲטוֹ הוֹאִיל שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה עוֹד רָאוּי, וְנִמְצָא לְפִי זֶה שֶׁעֲבֹדַת אַבְרָהָם לֹא הָיְתָה רְצוּיָה לְפָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם. וְעוֹד שְׁנִית שֶׁבַּעֲקִידָה לֹא זָכָה רַק בְּמַחְשְׁבָה וְעָקָר קְבוּל שָׂכָר הוּא עַל הַמַּעֲשֵׂה. וְאַדְרָבָּא נִדְרַה לְהַקְרִיב עוֹלָה וְלֹא קָזִים נִדְרוֹ, כְּדִכְתִּיב "וַיִּשָּׁח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֲצֵי הָעֹלָה" דְּמִשְׁמַע שֶׁכָּבֵר הַכִּינָם לְעוֹלָה וְהַמְשִׁיד עָלֵיהֶם הַקְדוּשָׁה וְאִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁתִּלְךָ קְדוּשָׁה זוֹ לְחוּלִין.

**Now, regarding Abraham, when he was prevented by Heaven from slaughtering his son, the righteousness of Abraham would not have been publicly recognized for two reasons.**

**First, there would have been an opening for the Attribute of Strict Judgment to say that Abraham did not truly withstand the trial, that he made some blemish upon Isaac to render him unfit as a sacrifice, and that is why Heaven prevented him from slaughtering him, since Isaac was no longer worthy. According to this, Abraham’s service would not have been pleasing before the Omnipresent.**

<sup>6</sup> Pirkei Avot 4:11.

<sup>7</sup> Zohar III:6a.

<sup>8</sup> Pirkei Avot 3:15.

<sup>9</sup> Rashi to Ex. 12:6: “They didn’t have in their hands mitzvot in which to engage in order to be redeemed, as it is said, ‘you were naked and bare’ [Ezek. 16:7], and He gave them two commandments: the blood of the Passover sacrifice and the blood of circumcision.”

Also, second, in the Binding of Isaac, he only merited a reward by thought, and the principal reward is for the action. To the contrary, he vowed to offer a burnt-offering and did not fulfill his vow, as it is written, “And he split the wood of the burnt-offering,”<sup>10</sup> “and Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering,”<sup>11</sup> meaning that he prepared [the wood] for the burnt-offering and conferred sanctity upon it, and such sanctity cannot simply go back to profane.

אָמנם עתה נִשְׂרָאָה שְׁדָרָךְ גַּם הַזְמִינוּ לוֹ הָאֵל, נִשְׁמַע מִיָּנָה שֶׁהִמָּקוֹם רָצָה בְּמַעֲשָׁיו וּבְמַחֲשַׁבּוֹתָיו וְהָיוּ לוֹ לְרִית גִּיחוֹת. וּמִשּׁוֹם הֵכִי הַזְמִין לוֹ הָאֵל כְּדֵי שִׁיתְקַנֵּים נָדָרוֹ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה נָמִי וְלֹא תִתְחַלֵּל הַקְדוּשָׁה דִּהְיִינוּ הַעֲצִים שֶׁהוּכְנוּ לְקְדוּשָׁה. וְאִם כֵּן הִנֵּה גַם גְּדוֹל וְשִׁמְחָה גְּדוֹלָה לְאַבְרָהָם לְרֹאוֹת מִיַּד הָאֵל, וּמִשּׁוֹם הֵכִי דִּנְקָא לְאַחַר שֶׁשַׁחַט הָאֵל הַתְּפִלָּה אַבְרָהָם וְלֹא קוּדֵם. וְעַנָּן תְּפִלָּתוֹ הִיָּתָה כְּשֵׁם שֶׁקְדוּשַׁת הַעֲצִים לֹא נִתְחַלְלָה כִּף לֹא תִתְחַלֵּל לְעוֹלָם קְדוּשַׁת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

However, now that he saw that, through a miracle, the ram was provided for him, it implied that the Omnipresent wanted his actions and his thoughts, and that they were pleasing to Him as a sweet aroma. Because of this, He prepared for him the ram, so that he would also fulfill his vow with an action, and that the sanctity, which was the wood prepared for sanctity, would not be profaned. If so, it was a great miracle and a great joy for Abraham to immediately see the ram. Because of this, Abraham prayed specifically after he slaughtered the ram, and not before. The content of his prayer was: Just as the sanctity of the wood was not profaned, so too may the sanctity of Israel never be profaned.

וְמָה שֶׁאָמַר הַכָּתוּב "זָכְרוֹן תְּרוּעָה" כִּף מִשְׁמַעוֹ, שֶׁתְּהִיָּה הַמַּחֲשָׁבָה וְהַכְּנוּנָה דִּהְיִינוּ הַזְכָּרוֹן מְחוּבָּרִים וּמְצוּמָדִים עִם הַמַּעֲשֵׂה דִּהְיִינוּ תְרוּעָה, וְזֶה אָנוּ לוֹמְדִים אוֹתוֹ מִן "וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה-אֵיל" כ"ל.

As far as Scripture saying “a memorial of sounding [the shofar],” the meaning is thus, that the thought and the intention, that is, the memorial, should be joined and united with the action, which is the sounding. We learn this from, “and he saw, and behold, a ram,” as explained above.

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<sup>10</sup> Gen. 22:3.

<sup>11</sup> Gen. 22:6.