Rosh Hashanah Day 2, TBZ
October 1st, 5780

Shana Tova to everyone, what a beautiful and high service, thank you to Rav Claudia and Tyler for leading us on this journey. Yesterday we read about the celebrated birth of Yitzhak and today we read about his near-death experience, the Akeidah. To modern eyes, this section can be troubling but we are blessed to have multiple levels on which to understand Torah. So let’s explore those levels.

The *p’shat*, the simplest meaning of this text is often what upsets people. If I stood here and told you I’ll be right back because God told me to ascend Summit Hill and offer my daughter as a sacrifice up there, you’d certainly worry about my mental health. So people ask, “How could Avraham do such a thing and follow such a call?” Thankfully, the *remez*, the allegorical level of this text, helps us understand that this is the Torah’s way of taking a stance *against* the practice of sacrificing children to please G!d or to arouse G!d’s favor. That was very common in ancient times and we see it in 2 Kings 3:27 where the King of Moav does just that.

This is all well and good when we read Parshat Vayera in November, in the Torah cycle, but it is not enough for Rosh Hashanah. What does this text have to teach us now? The 2nd verse of our first aliyah reads:

> הָקָּר וַיֹּאמֶר כָּלַא אֶת-בִּנְךָ אֶת-יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר-אָהַבְתָּ, וְלֶךְ-לֶךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה; וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ

And the Holy One gently said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Yitzhak, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him up as a burnt sacrifice there on one of the mountains which I will tell you.”

Our Shema reminds us,

> וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדֶך (You shall love G!d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might).

The midrash on this in Sifrei Devarim explains that to love Havayah with all
one’s heart means to do so with our yetzer ha-tov and our yetzer ha-ra, our desire to do good and our very human inclination to be a little evil. The midrash also understands “with all your heart” as not wavering in one’s commitment to service of the Divine. This is a fine kavannah for Rosh Hashanah and going into the new year which we can read into the story of the Akeidah. Perhaps Avraham wasn’t sure that this was really G!d telling him to do this. Yet in his love for G!d, he did not waver. He was firm in his commitment, which allowed him to go to such an extreme.

Now, I imagine most of you are wondering how we got from the Akeidah to the Shema. To me, this connection is the deepest and most concealed reason for hearing the Akeidah on Rosh Hashanah. At the last moment, as the knife was over Avraham’s head, and as the momentum was building to bring it down onto Yitzhak, Rachmana, the Merciful One calls out, “Avraham, Avraham!” And Avraham stops his hand and says “Hineni. I am here.” Even in the literal thrust of the moment, Avraham was there, and ready to listen. He wasn’t given over to his yetzer ha-ra, He was able to stop the knife. Then, Rachmana says to Avraham:

כְּתָּ אֶת-בִּנְךָ אֶת-יְחִידְךָ, מִמֶּנִּי
שַׂ כִּי-יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה, וְלֹא חָ

For you are a Yireh Elohim. You are in awe of G!d, you are a G!d fearer. And here we are now in these Yamim Noraim, these days of norah or yirah. The same root as yireh.

לָא תְּשַׁבֵּחַ אֶת-בְּנֵךְ אֶת-יְחִידְךָ, מִמֶּנִּי
וְלֹא חָ

You did not withhold your son, your only son from me, BECAUSE you are a Yireh Elohim. Avraham was able to give over completely to Divine Will. Bechol levavecha, with his yetzer ha-tov and especially with his yetzer ha-ra. Bechol nafshecha, even in the moment when G!d stood to take his soul, his son’s soul, the soul which he created, from him. And b’chol meodeacha, with all of his possessions, for Avraham shared all that he had, his tent was always open, he was always ready to serve. And because he didn’t withhold anything, not even his most beloved son, and was able to give everything, he was able to receive everything, as we read a few chapters later: רְאוּעָה בָּרָה אַתָּ-אָבְרָהָם בּוֹ.

(And G!d blessed Avraham baKol (with everything).
Kol is a name for the Source of Life that is Malchut, royalty, which is the essence of these coronation proceedings which make up our Rosh Hashanah services. Kol is a gift. Kol is an abundance mindset. Kol invites us to **be willing to** (not necessarily to have to!) but to be **willing to** give over everything we have and everything we are without fear because we are blessed with abundance. We have access to supernal bottomless blessing. Every year, we are asked to give all that we have, put everything on the line, to be in closer relationship with the Divine, trusting that we can be in the flow of divine blessing which is Kol. This allows us to make room in our lives for Havayah to work miracles! Torah shows us that we have access to this blessing of Kol, to this abundance mindset: Avraham passed it along to Yitzhak, Yitzhak to Ya’akov, Ya’akov to his children and Moshe blessed the people of Israel with Kol.

So, may the hearing of the Akeidah once again this year allow us to discover anything that we have been withholding from the Creator of all Life, or even from ourselves. May we discover what it means to give everything to our Divine in order to tap into the blessing of Kol. And may we all have a blessed, purposeful and sweet 5780.