

One day when I was working in a tech company on the border of two towns in Israel - Kfar Saba and Raanana, an American came to our office to visit, I guess from a satellite office in the US. He came to my room and was talking on the phone, and I remember him looking out the window over the big highway and the cityscape, out towards the city of Rannana. He was so excited to be there and was talking to his friend back in the states and said: "I'm here! I'm in Rosh Hashana!" I don't know if he really thought Rannana was named Rosh hashana or was just confused or overwhelmed with excitement, but Ronny and I have been joking about it for 10 years since. We're easily amused.

But when we were thinking about this drash, we remembered this story and wondered -- What does it mean to be IN Rosh Hashanah, really? That's actually where we all are right now. What's it all about?

And what does it mean to be in Rosh Hashana in the middle of a pandemic as well?

Is there anything the Akedah, the famous story of Abraham binding Isaac, can tell us about how to be in Rosh Hashanah?

We're all in a place **called Rosh hashana**, and we think it's close to the place where Abraham was in the Akedah. **The place** where the sacrifice is about to happen, which is going to be **called 'God will see'** - אֲדוֹנֵי יְרָאָה

Is the place of Rosh Hashana the place that God will see?

There are quite a few parts in the Akedah text that talk about **seeing**. Isaac notices that his father brought everything for the sacrifice, but wonders where the lamb itself is. And Abraham says אֲדוֹנֵי יְרָאָה לּוֹ הַשֶּׁה לְעֵלֶה בְּנִי, which literally means "God will **see** to himself the lamb my son", but it's not a sentence with a clear meaning. Rashi, one of the most well known medieval Rabbis and Torah commentators, interpreted that sentence to mean 'God will choose the lamb'. This interpretation opens the concept of seeing to more than a physical action. Perhaps it suggests you can choose what you see.

When Abraham is about to sacrifice his son and the angel stops him, he **SEES** a ram, a grown up sheep, not a lamb. He then stops and sacrifices the ram instead of Isaac.

It's interesting that at the start of the story God was the one who was supposed to SEE or choose the lamb, but eventually Abraham was the one who saw it. And not only that he saw it, it was a ram. A grown up sheep instead of an innocent young lamb. This suggests that the experience changes Abraham's ability to see or perceive or choose. Instead of God being the one to see, God makes Abraham see through this journey. Seeing a ram and not a lamb reflects Abraham's development and maturity of his vision. Not only is the object of the sacrifice growing up, but also Abraham's own perception.

At the end of the story Abraham modestly calls the place 'God will **SEE**'. Adonay Yiree. But as we just saw, this is only part of the story.

The text then continues and says 'Adonai yerae' - God will be seen.

So in this place both things are happening. God will SEE and will be SEEN.

God will have vision and we, or Abraham, will also develop our own vision.

What helps Abraham grow his vision through this experience?

During the whole story Abraham was in a unique state of mind. Just before he sees the ram and shows that his vision changed, the angel comes and tells Abraham that he is **Yere Elohim**. He is in awe of God.

So the state of mind of being in awe of God is what helps him grow his vision.

The words that are used here illuminate the connection between **Awe** and **Vision**.

The hebrew word **ירא (in awe of)** has a similar sound to the word **יראה (will see)**.

Because he is **Yere** Abraham **Yiree**. Because he is in awe of God, Abraham grows his sense of SEEING.

God will see the lamb

Abraham sees the ram

And God will be seen.

It seems like **being in Rosh Hashana** is **being** in a place where God **sees** and a place where you **see** God.

But also this exchange, the relationship between you and God, helps you develop your sense of perception.

The Akedah suggests that it isn't just that God sees us and we see God in general, at the mall, or while we're getting gas (though maybe that happens sometimes) but in a really specific context.

The context of this awful situation where what we love most deeply is being sacrificed, and we are going through our biggest struggles.

In the text God told Abraham to take his son that **he loved** - what he most loves is what is under threat in this story. And this is precisely the time when God sees him and he sees god.

That's so close to the truth of life. We go along with our business, and then something happens, and we find we're in that dangerous tilting point. When we start wondering what this is all about and why and shouldn't it all be different.

And if we're lucky, or maybe if we practice at it and work at it... that's when we also remember to see God and God remembers to see us.

Here we are in a time of a pandemic, and racism, and violence, and forest fires, and job loss, and so much devastation.

This is a time that is making us really recognize what it is that we love in life, what do we most care about. Our loves, our cherished things and people are coming to the forefront, and our struggles are coming to the forefront at the same time.

Yes, this is a time when we see God and God sees us, but it's also the time when like Abraham we can develop a more mature sense of vision. We can connect into the sense of Awe that is available around us. This can guide us towards strength and peace in the middle of disaster and struggle.

This puts us in the place of **Elohim yiree**, the name of the place in the Akedah.

We are in Rosh Hashanah.

In the story Abraham is not heartless. He is scared. But he is also strong and has a sense of stability. It's this special relationship to God that helps him to go through the struggle.

Can we all find this Rosh Hashanah place where we have peace and stability in the midst of this chaos?

It's a practice.

Call somebody who is maybe lonely over the last six month

Appreciate the workers who make our lives possible

Spend time to do things that are really meaningful to you

Light candles on Friday nights, come to Torah Study on a Saturday morning

Give help to somebody who needs it in your own unique way.

Together we can find peace and strength. We can come to the place of **Adonai Yiree**.

Shana Tova!