

Good *Yom Tov*, everyone.

I want to wish you all a *ksiva v'chasima tova*, and a sweet new year of good health and happiness, *bracha* and *hatzlacha* שימלא ה' כל משאלות לבכם לטובה.

Also, I want to welcome Rabbi and Rebbetzin Weinreb, who are with us for *Yom Tov*. It is always wonderful to have them here.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Anonymous.
- Anonymous, “*in honor of Rabbi Marwick, and wishing all of Klal Yisrael a good and healthy year.*”
- Chaim and Sherry Berlin, “*in honor of Rabbi Marwick’s devoted leadership of Shomrei Emunah during the pandemic.*”
- Mordechai and Miriam Gordon, “*in honor of Rabbi Marwick for all his hard work on behalf of our shul.*”
- Abby and Joe Hirsch, “*with gratitude to Rabbi Marwick, Shomrei’s officers and volunteers.*”

May Hashem reward the sponsors for their generous support of the shul with a year of good health, happiness, *bracha* and *hatzlacha*.

There was a folk saying in prewar Europe--“**during Elul, even the fish in the rivers tremble.**” In earlier generations, our ancestors felt a palpable sense of fear and urgency during the *Yamim Noraim*.

This sentiment is expressed in a famous Elul letter by **Rav Yisrael Salanter**, in his *Ohr Yisrael*(7):

האדם הוא וב"ב התלויים עליו בסכנה גדולה. לעת דין הגדול, היא עת תקיעת שופר בר"ה, אשר האדם נזכר ונשפט על מעשיו... ומה יחרד לב האדם האוהב את עצמו ואת ב"ב התלויים עליו... להטיב דרכו, ולכה"פ לשבור רוחו בשברון לבב,  
*A person who cares about himself and his family (who depend on him) should tremble on this day of great judgment, and be inspired to improve, and at least to humble his spirit with a broken heart.*

Do we feel any of that fear today? Do we feel any of that humbled spirit and broken heart today?

We are living in an age where Torah has flourished as never before. Today, there are more day schools, yeshivas, and kollelim than ever before in history. ArtScroll, Koren, and other publishers provide an ever-wider array of sefarim. And Zoom has greatly increased our access to shiurim on daf yomi, Mishna yomi, Nach yomi, and on and on. We feel pretty good about our observance...

So, why isn't the *geula* here? Why are we not all sitting together in Yerushalayim, singing triumphant songs? Why don't we truly feel the presence of Hashem and His judgment on this day, in our lives?

In the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, **Rav Dessler** in *Michtav M'Eliyahu III*: p.137 wrote:

נורא הענין לדורנו דור עקבתא דמשיחא דור היצוני. אנו רחוקים מהערכים הפנימיים של אמונה ובטחון, יראת שמים רצופה, טהרת הלב ואהבת הבריות זכה.

He writes that the generation preceding Mashiach will be exceedingly superficial. He writes that, unfortunately, that generation will be very far from possessing genuine values and sincere faith, true fear of heaven, purity of heart, and love of our fellow man.

Does that not sound like our generation? We are full of information, but lacking real depth. We have hundreds of contacts, but how many real friends? We know intellectually how we are supposed to feel. We know that we are being judged today. We know that we cannot take anything for granted. We know we should be afraid...or even terrified. But we just don't feel it...

Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, **Rav Soloveitchik**, in a 1976 Teshuva *drasha*, recorded in *Days of Awe* (pp. 59 and 60), observed: “*Contemporary Orthodoxy is well grounded intellectually. In spite of this, however, its followers lack passion and enthusiasm. This deficiency is especially evident on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur...How can a Jew pray on Yom Kippur and not feel the greatness, the fire and holiness of this day?* Again, does that not sound like our generation?”

It has been a scary year, a year when—ironically—it has been almost impossible to get to Yerushalayim. We had hoped that COVID would be finished by now, but it remains very much a part of our lives. And this year Klal Yisrael experienced three tragedies. In Meron, in a scene that is difficult to imagine, Jews inadvertently trampled other Jews to death. In Yerushalayim, the bleachers collapsed at a Karlin-Stolin event. In Florida, the Surfside building collapsed. What a painful year! On top of the pandemic that continued to take so many lives worldwide, and cause so much suffering. What message should we take from such a year—a year we have seen so much structural collapse? A year within which we have experienced so much pain and so much suffering.

We should be terrified. Hashem has sent us many messages over the year. We should be shaken from our lethargy. But today, don't we still struggle with religious apathy? We struggle with feeling connected to Hashem. *Mitzvos* are supposed to change us and the way we see the world—but if they are only skin deep; performed only superficially, they do not achieve their purpose. If they are acts without emotion, they do not transform us. We all know this. So, how do we transition from thought to action, from intellect to emotion. How do we infuse ourselves with such overwhelming religious fervor and excitement that we live our lives focused on what is important? That we see Hashem in our world?

To help us ignite a sense of passion within ourselves, Chazal set the stage for us to gain inspiration on Rosh Hashana from the man who brought religious passion to the world, Avraham Avinu. Others before him talked to God. But only one man was on fire—so to speak—with his love of Hashem. Avraham Avinu touched people's souls. הנפש אשר עשו בהרן The Medrash teaches that he was so committed to Hashem that he was not afraid to let Nimrod throw him into a fire. The imagery is that he was so consumed by the fire and passion of his cause that he was unfazed ...by fire. He brought that same אש, that inner fire and passion to the akeida as well. ויקח בידו את תאש The fire (with a heh hayediya) was a statement on Avraham's inner drive.

What does it mean to be on fire? The Torah highlights his passion for life—living each day driven to serve God in any way he could.

The classic mussar sefer, *Orchos Tzadikim*, writes that zerizus, a sense of passion and intensity, defined the life of Avraham Avinu. He was commanded to sacrifice his son, Yitzchak, for whom he had waited so long. What a difficult test. But he didn't simply go through the motions, while dragging his feet. Instead, he arose early in the morning, with a single-minded devotion, with passion, with fire.

אורחות צדיקים שער הזריזות השער הט"ו: הזריזות היא מעלה גדולה לתורה ולמצוות, וגם לענין תקנת העולם הזה, והיא מידת הצדיקים לעבודת הבורא, יתברך. ואמרו רבותינו, זכרונם לברכה: זריזין מקדימין למצוות. והנה תראה באברהם אבינו בענין עקידה, שנאמר "וישכם אברהם בבקר", ואף על פי שהיה קשה לו לשחוט את בנו יחידו, עשה רצון הבורא, יתעלה, בזריזות להשכים בבקר. ומי שעושה מעשיו בזריזות, בזה הוכחה גדולה שהוא אוהב את בוראו, כעבד האוהב את אדוניו ומזרז בעצמו לעשות רצונו. כי הזריזות תלויה בלב האדם, כשהאדם מפנה לבו מכל המחשבות האחרות שיש בו ותופס מחשבה אחת, אז הוא מזדרז, בלי ספק שיצליח.

In recounting akeidas Yitzchak, the Torah says ויקח את שני נעריו אתו—he took shnei ne-arav. This is usually translated that he took “his two young men.” But the **Baal Shem Tov** said (recorded in *Rebbes and Chasidim* by Rabbi A.Y. Twerski, p. 177) that the word “shnei” can also mean “years.” Thus, the phrase could be translated “he took the years of his youth—the enthusiasm, passion and vigor of youth--into this experience.”

**Rav Dessler** (מכתב מאליהו (ח"ב עמ' 178) writes that this attitude is not limited to Mitzvos bein adam la-Makom. In interpersonal Mitzvos, mitzvos bein adam le'chavero as well, there must be a burning passion. Someone with this attitude of zerizus does not wait for opportunities to come his way. Rather, he seeks out opportunities to help others, as Avraham did.

We are introduced to Avraham Avinu's sense of passion bein adam le'chavero after his bris mila. Although he should have stayed inside his tent to recover from his surgery, he sat outside looking for opportunities to help others and did so with passion and intensity—running and hurrying to help.

בראשית פרק יח וירא אליו יקוק באלני ממרא והוא ישב פתח האהל כחם היום:  
וישא עיניו וירא והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו וירא וירץ לקראתם מפתח האהל וישתחו ארצה:  
...וימחר אברהם האהלה אל שרה ויאמר מהרי שלש סאים קמה סלת לושי ועשי עגות:  
...ואל הבקר רץ אברהם ויקח בן בקר רך וטוב ויתן אל הנער וימחר לעשות אתו:

But Avraham Avinu's passion, as expressed at the akeda, goes even further; and it teaches us a valuable lesson about the relationship with Hashem we should aspire to.

Consider the following Gemara from Rosh Hashana:

גמ' ראש השנה: אמר רבי אבהו: למה תוקעין בשופר של איל? - אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: תקעו לפני בשופר של איל, כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת יצחק בן אברהם, ומעלה אני עליכם כאילו עקדתם עצמכם לפני.

*Rabbi Abahu stated: Why do we use a ram's horn for Shofar (on Rosh Hashana)?*

*He answered: Hashem said: blow the horn of a ram, to remind me of Akedas Yitzchak, and I will treat it as if you have offered yourselves in front of me.*

Why do we remember the ram? Avraham Avinu was ready to slaughter his only son from his beloved wife, Sarah. Despite the fact that he waited a century for Yitzchak to be born, he was completely prepared to follow God's directive. Only at the last minute, when a malach told him to stop and a ram became available, he slaughtered the ram instead. In light of what Avraham was prepared to do, to slaughter his beloved Yitzchak, a ram seems quite insignificant! Why remember the ram, of all things?

But if we look carefully in the Pesukim, we notice something quite fascinating

בראשית פרק כב  
(יב) ויאמר אל תשלח ירך אל הנער ואל תעש לו מאומה כי עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלהים אתה ולא חשכת את בנך את יחידך ממני:  
(יג) וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא והנה איל אחר נאחז בסבך בקרניו וילך אברהם ויקח את האיל ויעלהו לעלה תחת בנו:  
When the malach told Avraham not to slaughter Yitzchak, Hashem had already finished his directions for Avraham. Avraham was off the hook. He was given no further instructions by Hashem.  
(יג) וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא והנה איל אחר נאחז בסבך בקרניו וילך אברהם ויקח את האיל ויעלהו לעלה תחת בנו:

Notice that the phrase וישא אברהם את עיניו appeared after his bris mila when he looked for guests. At the akeda, Avraham again took the initiative, and, on his own, sought the opportunity to slaughter the ram. Nobody asked him to do this. He had passed the test from Hashem and would have been more than justified to simply go home.

**Rav Yisrael Salanter** (*Otzros HaTorah*, p. 233) writes that the ram represents Avraham's initiative in his avodas Hashem—his devotion in looking for an opportunity to express his passion for God. He was not looking to get away with the minimum, to just “check off a box.” Instead, he was consumed with a fire and motivation to achieve. And that is why—only then—did he receive a bracha. Until then, God had seen he was a *yarei* Hashem (someone who fears God). Afterwards, God saw he was also an *ohev* Hashem (someone who loves God).

**Rav Ahron Lopiansky** wrote, this year in *Mishpacha* magazine: *Eastern Europe in the 1800s looked religiously impressive. Mitzvah observance was the norm, communities obeyed their rabbanim, chassidish courts were booming, Volozhin was an incredible makom Torah, and there were many*

“kloizen,” small batei medrash where talmidei chachamim sat and learned Torah, without any formal yeshivah structure. A look at the face of it would bring a smile to any Torah Yid. But there was a person who could see a bit closer “to the heart,” and he was greatly troubled. Reb Yisrael Salanter sensed that the foundations of European Jewry had crumbled, and nothing had been done to shore them up. Most rabbanim of the era rebuked people for aveiros committed; Reb Yisrael, however, does not speak of specific aveiros. **Instead he bemoans a lack of tangible yirah.** In his famous letter about Elul, he points out the lack of emotional awe, and he in fact dedicated his life to try and rectify that. He understood that a hollowness had gnawed its way into the heart of Klal Yisrael, and unless that bedrock of yirah was greatly reinforced, it would all come crashing down.

. . . Unfortunately, Reb Yisrael Salanter was proven right. He passed away in 1883. And by the time World War I was over, 35 years later, Europe’s Torah Yiddishkeit had crumbled. Yes, the Haskalah was to blame, secular Zionism was to blame, Socialism was to blame, World War I was to blame. But the Mishnah in Avos (3:17) says otherwise. It says that if the roots are numerous enough, then all the winds cannot uproot the tree! If the tree was in fact uprooted, we need to ask ourselves why the roots weren’t up to the task. We have little control over the “winds” that buffet us; but we do have the ability to strengthen the roots. . . The only thing unpardonable is neglect and apathy.

Living a life of Mitzva observance is not just about checking off boxes, doing the minimum, or even accumulating a lot of good deeds. It is about living life with depth and determination, with commitment and kindness, with passion and pride. It is about integrating the Torah’s values and lessons into our core being, developing true yiras Shamayim--a genuine understanding of what it means to be עובדי ה' and living with a sense of purpose, and a sense of simcha that we have the opportunity to live in the Hashem’s world and follow His will to sanctify His name.

The Holy **Piacezner Rebbe**, the Rav of the Warsaw Ghetto, in a drasha he gave in 1940 (*Holy Fire*, pp. 44 and 45) told his chasidim “we must imbue every aspect of our lives with that sense of “I am my beloved’s.” אבי ללודי This means, first of all, that we must fulfill the Torah and the commandments in thought, word, and deed. We should realize that the foundation and goal of our lives is fulfilling the Torah and commandments, and being a Jew. We should realize that God created us for that purpose. **We must give ourselves to God with every fiber of our being....**

Today is the day to commit to live an inspired life of passionate Kiddush Hashem. To be inspired by the life story of our great ancestor, Avraham Avinu. To ignite that flame within us, to better appreciate the **privilege** of being Jewish. To appreciate the ability to **sanctify** the world with every good deed, every kind word. To appreciate the ability to have a close relationship with Hashem... And to seek out opportunities for growth. Not to wait for opportunities to find us, but to seek out ways to help others. To change the way we think about Mitzvos—as precious and sacred opportunities we should be running towards, not as heavy burdens we look to avoid.

As we say every day during this season אהת שאלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש we must live life with **one overarching ambition and goal**---ימי היי...to live with an unbending commitment to do Hashem’s will, and live proudly by His principles and values.

May we commit on this day to live lives of greater depth. And may we and our families be inscribed in the Book of Life for a good year, of health, happiness, prosperity and find true success in our avodas Hashem. Wishing everyone a *ksiva vachasima tova!*