



“You shall recall the binding of Yitzchak mercifully for the sake of his children, today”

Blowing the Shofar as a Reminder of Akeidas Yitzchak which Was on Rosh HaShanah Is a Marvelous Tikun for the Cheit Eitz HaDa’as which Was Also on Rosh HaShanah

In honor of the auspiciously approaching Rosh HaShanah 5786, it is fitting to begin the new year with an essay focusing on the incredible mitzvah of “tekias shofar.” This mitzvah is the centerpiece of the prayer service on Rosh HaShanah, in keeping with the passuk (Bamidbar 29, 1): **“ובחודש השביעי באחד לחודש מקרא קודש יהיה לכם כל מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו יום תרועה יהיה לכם—in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall do no laborious work, it shall be a day of shofar-blowing for you.”**

In the Gemara (R.H. 16a), Chazal explain the rationale for blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah: **“אמר רבי אבהו למה תוקעין בשופר של איל, אמר הקב”ה תקעו לפני בשופר של איל, כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת יצחק בן אברהם, ומעלה אני עליכם כאילו עקדתם עצמכם.”** Rabbi Abahu said: **Why do we blow shofar with a ram’s horn? Because HKB”H said, “Blow before Me the shofar of a ram, so that I will recall on your behalf the ‘akeidah’ of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham; and I will consider it as if you bound yourselves before Me.”**

The mitzvah of blowing the shofar on Rosh HaShanah to commemorate Akeidas Yitzchak has a tremendous impact on HKB”H, so to speak. “Tekias shofar” possesses the amazing power to prompt HKB”H to vacate His throne of “din” and occupy His throne of “rachamim.” This is taught in the Midrash (V.R. 29, 3):

Rabbi Yehudah the son of Rabbi Nachman began his discourse by citing the passuk (Tehillim 47, 6): “Elokim rose with the ‘teruah’; Havaya with the sound of the shofar.” The passuk initially employs the name Elokim—the name associated with “midas hadin”—and subsequently employs the name Havaya—the name associated with “midas harachamim.” This indicates that initially HKB”H occupies the throne of “din” with the intent of judging strictly; but **when Yisrael take their shofars and sound them in the presence of HKB”H, He vacates the throne of “din” and occupies the throne of “rachamim.”** Thus, He treats them with extreme mercy, and transforms “midas hadin” to “rachamim” for them. **When does this occur? In the seventh month.**

In this essay, we will endeavor to explain the intimate connection between Akeidas Yitzchak and Rosh HaShanah. Additionally, why did our sages of blessed memory choose to name this momentous ordeal **Akeidas Yitzchak** rather than **Akeidas Avraham**? After all, HKB”H was testing Avraham by asking him to bind his son Yitzchak atop the mizbeiach and offer him up as a korban.

On Rosh HaShanah All of the Neshamos Partook in the Cheit Eitz HaDa’as

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing what the Ran (R.H. 16a) explains in the name

of the Midrash regarding the reason Rosh HaShanah is the Day of Judgment for all creation. As we know, the world was created on the 25th of Elul. On the day we celebrate as Rosh HaShanah, the sixth day of creation, the 1st of Tishrei, Adam HaRishon was created. On that day, Adam was commanded not to eat from the Eitz HaDa'as; on that day he sinned; on that day, he performed teshuvah and was exonerated. The Pesikta (23) records what transpired on that historic day, hour by hour: **Adam was conceived intellectually during the first hour; HKB"H consulted with the ministering angels during the second hour; during the third to sixth hours man's physical form was created from the dust and soil; a neshamah was injected into his inanimate form during the seventh hour; he was introduced into Gan Eden in the eighth hour; he was commanded not to eat from the Eitz HaDa'as in the ninth hour; he transgressed this command in the tenth hour; he was judged in the eleventh hour; he was acquitted in the twelfth hour. HKB"H said to him: This is a sign for your descendants; just as you stood before Me in judgment on this day and were acquitted, so, too, are they destined to stand before Me in judgment on this day and be acquitted. When did all of this occur? On the first day of the seventh month.**

It appears that we can expand on this notion. The illustrious Arizal teaches us a fundamental concept. All future neshamos were contained within Adam HaRishon when he sinned with the Eitz HaDa'as. Hence, they were all sentenced to death for participating in the sin. This explains very nicely what the Ran teaches in the name of the Midrash—that Rosh HaShanah is the Day of Judgment for all of mankind, because Adam HaRishon was created on that day, sinned on that day by eating from the Eitz HaDa'as, and was judged by HKB"H on that day. As it is written (Bereishis 3, 19): **”בזעת אפך תאכל לחם עד שובך אל”** **—by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to the ground from which you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust shall your return.**

Therefore, since every Jew participated in the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as” on the first Rosh HaShanah, each individual is judged again annually to determine whether or not he

is perpetuating that rebellion—neglecting to abide by the command of HKB”H. If found guilty, chas v’shalom, he will be sentenced to the same fate as Addam HaRishon—difficulty earning a parnasah and death. If he performs teshuvah, however, HKB”H will forgive him just like He forgave Adam HaRishon; Adam’s life was extended, and he did not die on that same day.

Avraham Avinu a Gilgul of Adam HaRishon Bound Yitzchak on the Mizbeiach on Rosh HaShanah

In this manner, we can explain why we are commanded to blow the shofar on Rosh HaShanah to commemorate Akeidas Yitzchak. We learn in the Zohar hakadosh (Vayikra 18a): “אמר רבי אבא בגין כן קרינן פרשתא דיצחק בהאי יומא, דבהאי יומא: ”**Rabbi Abba said: Because of this, we read the passage of the Akeidah on this day (Rosh HaShanah), because Yitzchak was bound on this day.**

In Zohar Chai (Part 2, page 280, column 4), the commentary of the divine kabbalist, the Mahari of Komarna, on the Zohar, he presents a wonderful remez substantiating what we have learned. In the passage of the Akeidah, it says (ibid. 22, 1): "והאלהים נס"ה א"ת אברהם". The gematria of these four words equals רא"ש השנה (861). In other words, this suggests that the Akeidah took place on Rosh HaShanah, the day that Adam HaRishon fell victim to the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as."

Additionally, we should note that in the sefer Ohr Torah (Nitzavim 56), the brilliant Rabbi Meir Yechiel of Ostrovitz, ztz"l, explains why they instituted to conclude the berachah of Zichronos in Mussaf on Rosh HaShanah with the formula: **"ועקידת יצחק לזרעו היום ברחמים תזכור"**—**and You shall recall the Akeidah of Yitzchak mercifully for the sake of his children, today.** He notes that this formula attributes the Akeidah to Yitzchak and not to Avraham.

To explain the matter, he refers to the language of the vidui: “אבל אנחנו ואבותינו חטאנו”—**but we and our fathers have sinned**. This is a surprising declaration. We most certainly must confess to our own transgressions, but who appointed us legal guardians to confess for the transgressions of our fathers? In point of fact, it is written in the Torah (Vayikra 26, 40): “והתוודו את עוונם ואת” —**and they will confess their sin and the sin**

of their forefathers. In fact, this also requires further explanation: why is it necessary for us to also confess the sins of our fathers?

To explain the matter, he relies on a fundamental principle. Every human being contains within him all the neshamos of his future descendants. It is analogous to the root of a tree that contains within it all the branches and fruit that are destined to grow from it. Accordingly, it stands to reason that a person himself might be a tzaddik and not likely to sin of his own accord; yet, since he contains within him descendants that are destined to sin, they cause him to sin, as well. For this reason, one must confess that **“we and our fathers have sinned”**—not only have we sinned, but we have also caused our fathers to sin when we were yet within them.

Accordingly, before Yitzchak was born, all Jewish neshamos were contained in Avraham. After he fathered Yitzchak, all those neshamos were transferred to Yitzchak. Even if Avraham had passed away on the day Yitzchak was born, all Jewish neshamos would have descended from him. This is why we pray: **“And You shall recall the Akeidah of Yitzchak mercifully for the sake of his children, today.”** Since at the time of the Akeidah all the neshamos of Yisrael were contained in Yitzchak and not Avraham, it was as if all of Yisrael were placed on top of the mizbeiach together with Yitzchak. This is his sacred insight.

We can now better appreciate a teaching in the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayeira 23). When Avraham Avinu withstood the ordeal of the Akeidah, HKB”H promised him that He would exonerate his children on every Rosh HaShanah. The Midrash records a conversation between Avraham and HKB”H:

Avraham says: “You and I swore that I would not leave this altar until I’ve had my full say.” HKB”H replied: “Speak your mind.” Avraham says: “Yesterday, You told me that my offspring would be named after Yitzchak. Now, You are telling me to sacrifice him on the altar. I controlled my inclination and did not protest. In similar fashion, when Yitzchak’s children sin and are in trouble, recall Yitzchak’s “akeidah” on their behalf. Consider it as if his ashes lie here atop the altar. In his merit, forgive them and redeem them.”

HKB”H responds: “You’ve had your say; now, I shall have Mine. Yitzchak’s children are destined to sin and transgress My commands. I will judge them on Rosh HaShanah. If they ask Me to seek merit on their behalf and to remember the akeidah of Yitzchak, they should sound this one’s ‘shofar.’” Avraham inquires: “What is a ‘shofar’?” HKB”H answers: “Step back.” Avraham looks around and sees a ram entangled in the thicket by its horns . . . HKB”H said to him: “They need only blow into the horn of a ram, and I will spare them and pardon their transgressions.”

As explained, the ordeal of the Akeidah occurred on Rosh HaShanah. Therefore, HKB”H promised Avraham that on every Rosh HaShanah, when his children blow the shofar, He would exonerate them and find merit in them. This is the reason that our blessed sages instituted the mention of Akeidas Yitzchak in the Mussaf service of Rosh HaShanah at the conclusion of the berachah of the pesukim of Zichronos: **“ועקידת יצחק לזרעו היום ברחמים תזכור”**.

I View It as if You Bound Yourself before Me

Thus, we have learned that two remarkable events occurred on Rosh HaShanah that impacted all future generations. The first was the creation of Adam HaRishon by HKB”H. On the very same day, he sinned by partaking of the Eitz HaDa’as along with all the neshamos within him. As a consequence, they all became subject to death. The second was the ordeal of Akeidas Yitzchak. Avraham bound his son Yitzchak on the mizbeiach together with all the neshamos of Yisrael contained within him on Rosh HaShanah.

The rationale for the mitzvah of “tekias shofar” on Rosh HaShanah should now be obvious. Every Rosh HaShanah, the day on which Adam HaRishon and all the neshamos within him sinned, is a new Day of Judgment. It is necessary to discern whether or not all current living beings are trying to make amends for the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as.”

Then, when Yisrael blow a shofar made from a ram’s horn to commemorate Akeidas Yitzchak, which also took place on Rosh HaShanah, we acknowledge the fact that every Jew, ourselves included, was present within Yitzchak Avinu when he was bound on the mizbeiach. Hence, blowing the

shofar to recall Akeidas Yitzchak has a profound effect on HKB”H. He rises from the throne of judgment which He sits upon on Rosh HaShanah to judge all the neshamos that participated in the sin of Adam HaRishon. He then sits down on the throne of “rachamim,” since they were subsequently participants involved in the Akeidah of Yitzchak, which also took place on Rosh HaShanah.

This is the implication of the statement in the Gemara: “אמר הקב”ה תקעו לפני בשופר של איל כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת יצחק” HKB”H בן אברהם, ומעלה אני עליכם כאילו עקדתם עצמכם לפני.” instructed us to blow the shofar from a ram, so that He will recall Akeidas Yitzchak for us. This will cause Him to elevate us to the status of being a part of Yitzchak at the time of the Akeidah. Thus, it is “**as if you bound yourselves before Me.**”

Why Do We Mention the Binding of Yitzchak rather than the Lifting of Yitzchak onto the Mizbeiach?

Continuing on this sacred journey, we will now explain why our blessed sages refer to the ordeal of placing Yitzchak on the mizbeiach as a korban “olah” as **Akeidas Yitzchak—the Binding of Yitzchak**—in the Gemara, in the Midrash, and in our tefilos. After all, the passuk describes what happened as follows (Bereishis 22, 9): “ויבן שם אברהם את המזבח, ויערוך את העצים, ויעקוד את יצחק בנו, וישם אותו על המזבח—**Avraham built the mizbeiach there; he arranged the wood; he bound Yitzchak, his son; he placed him on the mizbeiach above the wood.**”

The passuk enumerates four actions performed by Avraham: “ויבן, ויערוך, ויעקוד, וישם”—**he built, he arranged, he bound, and he placed.** [We can postulate that these four actions correspond to the four letters of the holy name Havaya.] So, why was this ordeal named “Akeidas Yitzchak” specifically after the third act described in the passuk: “**He bound Yitzchak, his son**”? It could just as appropriately have been called “העלאת יצחק”, since the main objective was to lift him up onto the mizbeiach and sacrifice him as a korban “olah”; that is what Hashem instructed Avraham to do (ibid. 2): “והעלהו שם לעולה”.

We find a marvelous insight in the writings of the Ktav Sofer. He addresses the Gemara cited above: **HKB”H said, “Blow before Me the shofar of a ram, so that I will**

recall on your behalf the ‘akeidah’ of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham; and I will consider it as if you bound yourselves before Me.” He explains the Gemara based on the following Midrash (Tanchuma, Vayeira 23): “**He bound Yitzchak, his son.**” When he came to slaughter, he (Yitzchak) said to him, “Father, bind my hands and feet . . . perhaps I will shake when I see the knife, and the korban will be disqualified. Please, to not make a blemish in me.” Avraham immediately extended his hand and took the knife to slaughter.

Accordingly, the Ktav Sofer asserts that this is why we always invoke the merit of “Akeidas Yitzchak.” The fact that Yitzchak requested that Avraham bind him benefits every Jew. For, if the holy Yitzchak Avinu requested assistance to overcome his yetzer, so that he would not resist involuntarily, what more can be expected of the rest of us mere mortals in our constant, relentless confrontations with the yetzer?!

This is the message conveyed by Rabbi Abahu: “אמר הקב”ה תקעו לפני בשופר של איל, כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת יצחק בן אברהם.” HKB”H instructed us to sound the ram’s horn in order to specifically recall the binding of Yitzchak—**Akeidas Yitzchak**—the fact that Yitzchak asked Avraham to bind him out of fear of the yetzer; “ומעלה אני עליכם כאילו עקדתם עצמכם לפני”—and it benefits every Jew, because HKB”H considers it as if each person bound himself. In the words of the Gemara (Berachos 17a): “גלוי וידוע לפניך שרצוננו לעשות” —it is apparent to HKB”H that it is our will to satisfy His will; yet we are hampered by the yetzer and the oppression of the regimes that reign over us.

Yitzchak’s Hands and Feet Were Bound

Let us add a little spice to the explanation of why Chazal chose to refer to the tenth test Avraham Avinu was subjected to as **Akeidas Yitzchak**. In fact, we see that even HKB”H refers to this momentous event as **Akeidas Yitzchak**: “תקעו לפני בשופר של איל כדי שאזכור לכם עקידת יצחק בן אברהם”. Rashi enlightens us (Bereishis 22, 9): **Avraham bound Yitzchak’s hands and feet behind him; the tying of the hands and feet together is referred to as “binding.”** In other words, he tied the right hand to the right foot and

the left hand to the left foot. The source for this notion is the Gemara (Shabbas 54a): **עקוד עקידת יד ורגל "אמר רב יהודה, כיצחק בן אברהם."** Regarding the Mishnah's statement that an animal may not be allowed out on the Shabbas "bound," **Rabbi Yehudah explains that this refers to the binding of hand and foot, as was done to Yitzchak the son of Avraham.** Rashi explains that Yitzchak's hands and feet were stretched backwards; each hand was bound to its corresponding foot; this exposed the back of the neck.

Let us suggest an explanation for Avraham's profound decision to bind Yitzchak in this manner in order to sacrifice him to Hashem. Clearly, a person's two hands are the tools with which he performs every conceivable action. Whereas a person's two feet facilitate ambulation—enabling a person to move about from place to place. The following passuk reflects this fact (ibid. 41, 44): **ויאמר פרעה אל יוסף אני פרעה ובלעדיך לא ירים איש את ידו ואת רגלו בכל "ויאמר"**—Pharaoh empowered Yosef to the extent that no man would raise a hand or foot throughout Mitzrayim without his permission. Thus, we see that raising one's hands and feet encompasses all human activity.

Now, every Jew is obligated to subjugate all of his limbs and senses to the will of Hashem—to the point that he has no personal desire to perform any act or go anyplace other than for the sake of Hashem. This concept is presented by the Bnei Yissaschar (Kislev-Teves 4, 2) in the name of the Chovat HaLevAvos: **כתב הרב החסיד בעל חובת הלבבות, בגדר "העבד הנאמן בעבודתו לאדונו, לא ישב, ולא יעמוד, ולא ילך, כי אם בהפקת רצון האדון, לא יחפוז כי אם רצונו"**—a loyal servant does not sit, stand, or move, if his master does not wish him to do so; the servant's only desire is to satisfy his master's will.

The Nachash Used Its Hands and Feet to Cause Adam and Chava to Sin

We will now explain the deeper significance of Avraham binding Yitzchak's hands and feet, which, as we have just explained, is one of the reasons this momentous ordeal was named **Akeidas Yitzchak—the Binding of Yitzchak.** I will begin by introducing a fascinating passage in the Avos D'Rabbi Nasan (1, 5). Here is a translated synopsis of the passage:

Realizing that he could not persuade Adam to sin, the nachash decided to try his luck with Chava. He sat near her and engaged her in a lengthy conversation. He showed her that he could touch the tree without dying; he told her that she could also touch the tree without dying. What did the evil nachash do next? It stood up and touched the tree with its hands and feet—shaking it until some of its fruit fell to the ground. Seeing what it was doing, the tree screamed at it, instructing the evil one not to touch it—as it states (Tehillim 36, 12): "Bring me not the foot of the arrogant, and let the hand of the wicked not move me."

This teaches us a vital lesson. The first sin in history, which occurred on the first Rosh HaShanah, was perpetrated by the "nachash hakadmoni" by using its hands and feet to rebel against Hashem, the Almighty G-d. Not only did the nachash employ its hands and feet to trap Adam and Chava in its duplicitous net, but it also induced them to rebel against Hashem with their own hands and feet.

Here is Rashi's comment on the passuk (Bereishis 3, 4): **The nachash pushed her, causing her to touch the tree; then he said to her, "Just as you did not die from touching it, so too you will not die from eating of it."** In other words, the nachash pushed her, forcing her to get closer to the forbidden tree by moving her feet. Once next to the tree, she picked up the fruit with her own hands, as it is written (ibid. 5): **"ותקח מפריה ותאכל ותתן גם לאישה עמה"**—she took of the fruit and ate; and she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. The same applies to Adam HaRishon; due to the persuasion of the nachash, he walked with his feet and took the fruit of the Eitz HaDa'as in his hands. This sequence of events is depicted in the Midrash Shochar Tov on the passuk (Tehillim 1, 1): **"אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חטאים לא עמד ובמושב לצים לא ישב."** Praised be the man who refrained from following the counsel of the wicked, and stood not in the path of the sinful, and sat not in the session of scorners. The Midrash interprets this as a reference to Adam HaRishon: **"מדבר באדם הראשון, אמר אדם הראשון, אשרני אם לא עמדתי בדרכיו של Adam HaRishon נחש, ואשרי אם לא ישבתי במושביו של ליצנות."** Adam HaRishon said, "Fortunate am I if I have not followed the ways of the serpent, and fortunate am I if I have not sat in the company of scoffers."

We can now better appreciate and delight in the wonders of the Torah. On Rosh HaShanah, Adam and Chava fell from grace by using their hands and feet to partake of the Eitz HaDa'as. They were induced to do so by the deceit of the "nachash hakadmoni," who used its hands and feet to trap them. Hence, specifically on Rosh HaShanah, Yitzchak requested that his father, Avraham, bind his hands and feet, so they would not fall prey to the persuasions of the nachash—as Adam and Chava did—by resisting the mitzvah of the Akeidah with his hands and feet. Avraham acquiesced to his request, as it states: **"He bound Yitzchak, his son."** Through these actions, Avraham and Yitzchak, gilgulim or Adam HaRishon, performed a tikun for their part in that fateful deed.

In summary, we have learned that the mutiny of the "nachash hakadmoni" in Gan Eden, which is the source of all sin and evil, was facilitated by its hands and feet, which were used to induce Adam and Chava to eat from the Eitz HaDa'as. Therefore, when our first forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, embarked on the mission of establishing the lineage of kedushah of the house of Yisrael, HKB"Y commanded Avraham to place Yitzchak on top of the mizbeiach, so that he could bind Yitzchak's hands and feet to demonstrate total submission and self-sacrifice to Hashem. What they did served as a symbolic gesture for all Jews to be able to sanctify themselves with their hands and feet—not to perform any act or go to any place that is not solely for the sake of Hashem.



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