

The Cognitive, Emotional, and Sensory Experience of the Yamim Nora'im: The Message of the Akedah

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In *Sefer Mishlei*, Shlomo ha-Melekh teaches that the acquisition of the “wisdom” of Torah requires a “total body experience,” in which all faculties of one’s being are completely immersed in this process. One must not only be receptive to the wise teachings of the Torah; one must absorb these teachings and make them an integral part of the daily fabric of your life. As Shlomo declares, “The beginning of wisdom is to acquire wisdom (ראשית חכמה קנה חכמה) [Prov. 4:7],” such that it becomes a *kinyan*, one’s everlasting possession. This accomplishment evolves through a steady, progressive course of action that involves not only cognitive perception but total absorption through the active participation of one’s physical capacities, senses, and emotions. As Shlomo elaborates,

My son, listen to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes. Guard them in your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh . . . Remove the crookedness of the mouth from you, and keep away from yourself the perversity of lips. Your eyes should look forward, and your eyelids should gaze straight ahead. Measure carefully the path of your feet and let all your ways be firmly established. Do not swerve left or right; keep your feet from evil

Proverbs 4:20-27

בני לדברי הקשיבה לאמרי הט
אזנך: אל יליזו מעיניך שמרם
בתוך לבבך: כי חיים הם
למצאיהם ולכל בשרו מרפא: ...
הסר ממך עקשות פה ולזות
שפתים הרחק ממך: עיניך לנכח
יביטו ועפעפיך יישרו נגדך: פלס
מעגל רגלך וכל דרכיך יכנו: אל
תט ימין ושמאול הסר רגלך מרע:
משלי ד: כ-כז

The acquisition of the teachings of the Torah should be so complete that one develops an intimate, emotional attachment to them; as Shlomo explains, “Do not abandon it, and it will guard you. **Love** it and it will protect you ... caress it (סלסלה)⁶¹ and it will uplift you; it will honor you

⁶¹ On this rendition of the term, סלסלה, compare *Mezudat David* and *Mezudat Zion*, 4:8.

when you embrace it (תחבקנה)[*ibid.* 4:6, 8].”⁶² To be a Torah Jew, declares Shlomo, one must allow the message and meaning of the Torah to permeate every aspect of your being, heart and mind. The essence of Judaism must fill your entire soul; it must pervade your entire reality.

The enlistment of all of one’s capacities in the endeavor to become a complete Torah Jew is also impressed upon *Bnei Yisrael* in Moshe Rabbenu’s final message to his nation before they embark on their momentous journey into *Eretz Yisrael*. In *Va’etchanan*, Moshe appeals to *Bnei Yisrael*’s senses, to their cognitive and emotional powers, and to their potential to put thought into action, enlisting the whole corpus of their beings to fulfill the Torah and its commandments. More than once, Moshe addresses his beloved nation with the introductory refrain, “Listen, Israel (שמע ישראל) ” [Deut. 4:1, 5:1 6:4], declaring that they must be receptive to the Torah’s teachings, of which he reminds them; complete attentiveness is the first step to the desired outcome, the active implementation of these instructions.

Listen Israel to the laws and statutes that I speak into your ears today, and learn them and be diligent to perform them.

Deut. 5:1

שמע ישראל את החקים ואת המשפטים אשר אנכי
דבר באזניכם היום ולמדתם אתם ושמרתם לעשותם
דברים ה:א

Furthermore, Moshe reminds them of their unique status as an 'עם ה', by recalling how they *heard* the voice of God speaking to them directly (”השמע עם קול אלקים מדבר מתוך האש כאשר [Deut. 4:33]). Invoking the sense of sight in numerous passages, Moshe emphasizes that *Bnei Yisrael* need to contemplate and assimilate what their eyes have seen and witnessed: the great wonders that God performed for them in Egypt and at Mt. Sinai, when they perceived His presence, intangible though He is.

Has there ever been a time when a god miraculously came to take for himself a nation from the midst of another nation with great acts, and signs and wonders, by war and a mighty, outstretched hand, and awesome power like all that Hashem, your God, did for you in Egypt before your very eyes.”

Deut. 4:34

הנסה אלקים לבוא לקחת לו גוי מקרב
גוי במסת באתת ובמופתים ובמלהמה
וביד הזקה ובזרוע נטויה ובמוראים
גדלים ככל אשר עשה לכם ה' אלקיכם
במצרים לעיניך
דברים ד:לד

Moshe describes the Jew’s relationship to God as an intimate bond. “ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם (But you who *cling* to Hashem, your God, you are all alive today)” [Deut. 4:4]. While Moshe is speaking to the generation which will enter the land of Israel, one may also interpret this verse to mean that by “clinging” to God, sensing that He is with you at all times, and desiring to fulfill His will, you feel completely “alive” in every fiber of your being. When an

⁶² For an analysis of the course of action required for the complete acquisition of “wisdom” as described in the Book of Proverbs, see Michael V. Fox, “Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116/4 (1997): 613-633; note especially his observations, p. 620, “Wisdom has an attitudinal or emotional as well as an intellectual component. That is why the son is urged not only to learn wisdom but to love and desire it (4:6-8). Wisdom is a configuration of soul; it is *moral character*.” See as well idem, “Words for Wisdom: בינה and תבונה; ערמה and ערמה; מוֹמָה and ערמה; תרשיה and עצה,” *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 6/2 (1993): 149-69, and idem, “The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113/2 (1994): 233-43.

individual recognizes that his very essence is defined by his relationship with God and His Torah and Mitzvot, then he has found the secret and meaning of “life” itself.⁶³ This acknowledgment must not only be in your heart; it must become imprinted on your mind. As Moshe reiterates, “You have been shown in order to know (אתה הראת לדעת) that Hashem, He is your God. There is none beside Him” [Deut. 4:35].

Therefore, the command to “love God” is expressed as a full body experience:

*You shall love Hashem your God with all your heart,
with all your being, and with all your substance”*

Deut. 6:5⁶⁴

ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך
ובכל מאדך
דברים ו:ה

Observing the Torah and Mitzvot is the recipe for success in all aspects of life. As Rashi explains in his commentary on *Shema*, “והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך” (Deut. 6:6), God expects that every Jew should wake up in the morning and look upon the Torah as something new and vibrant, a guiding light that directs you in your daily journey through life, not as an ancient writing that has become a relic of days gone by.⁶⁵

Based on these teachings from Moshe and Shlomo, it is possible to explain why the narrative of the Akedah trial (*Bereishit* 22) is read on Rosh ha-Shanah. At the conclusion of this ordeal, Avraham names the place where he sacrificed the ram instead of Isaac, ה' יראה, literally, “God will see” (Gen. 22:14). Based on the midrash, Rashi explains that Avraham prayed God would always “see” and perceive the greatness of this patriarch’s actions at Mt. Moriah, and this recollection would prompt God to forgive future generations of Israel from its sins and save them from punishment.⁶⁶ However, the merit of the Akedah can only serve as a potent means for atonement if one grasps the message that this experience teaches about the extent to which God expects every Jew to demonstrate his commitment to Torah and Mitzvot.

In his opening remarks on the implications of this “test,” Ramban observes that this description of God’s initiative (והאלקים נסה את אברהם), applies only to the human being who has the capacity to choose whether he will prevail and embrace the challenge or walk away from the trial and ultimately fail in this endeavor. God, Who is All-Knowing, does not require such an experience in order to “learn” how the individual will act under these circumstances. Nevertheless, God insists that while He has foresight, the act itself is significant. As Ramban explains, “The *Tester*, Blessed be He, commands him [the one being tested] in order to bring forth the matter from *potential* to

⁶³ Compare the commentaries of *Ohr ha-Chayyim* and *Ha’amek Davar* on this verse. See as well Deut. 4:7, in which Moshe emphasizes the singular position of *Bnei Yisrael*, a nation that has a God Who is close to them and hears them whenever they call out to Him; compare Rashbam, Deut. 4:7.

⁶⁴ The translation of this verse derives from Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 881. In his notes on this verse, *ibid.*, Fox observes that “the couplet ‘heart and being,’ which occurs a number of times in Deuteronomy might also indicate ‘mind and emotions’.” Cf. Rashi, Deut. 6:5, whose commentary underscores the totality of one’s commitment to love of God; compare Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, 10:5, who analyzes this verse in relation to this all-encompassing devotion to God.

⁶⁵ Rashi, Deut. 6:6, based on *Sifrei*, *pisqa* 8.

⁶⁶ Rashi, Gen. 22:14, based on *Tanhuma*, *Va-Yera* 23.

being was created, a purpose which would eventually be realized through the creation of Israel and its fulfillment of God's commandments.

Sforno posits that when God stipulated His intent to create man "בצלם אלקים" (Gen. 1:27), He presented the individual with a divine-like capacity by bestowing upon him the power of the intellect.⁷² However, this faculty is only an "image of God," a potential which must be realized through man perfecting himself. Every individual must actualize his potential through cognitive speculation about God's existence and His greatness which leads to fear and love of Him as well as through concrete action, by means of which man demonstrates this love and fear of God, particularly in choosing the proper Torah way of behavior through the fulfillment of God's commandments. In doing so, he becomes similar to his Creator, who actively implements His intent and brings forth everything into actuality.⁷³

How would the Akedah trial serve to demonstrate that Avraham has elevated himself to become more similar to God, his Creator? God determined that this challenge would necessitate a "full body experience," a complete and total involvement of all of Avraham's faculties- cognitive, emotional, and physical- so that he would serve as the paradigmatic example of one who understands what God expects from *Bnei Yisrael* in their dedication to His will through the wisdom of the Torah and its Mitzvot.

Accordingly, the Akedah experience was a process, each step of the way aiming to engage a different bodily faculty until all of Avraham's being was involved in the completion of this trial. In order to activate Avraham's psychological and emotional faculties, God formulates His command in a way that intensifies Avraham's realization of the difficulty of this challenge. "Take now *your son, your only son*,⁷⁴ whom you love, Isaac (את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק) and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will point out to you"

⁷² On the understanding of man being created in a "divine image" as indicative of man's intellectual capacity, Sforno was probably influenced by Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 1:1, in his discussion of the definition of צלם and דמות. Compare Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesodei Torah*, 4:8-9. On Maimonides' understanding of "צלם אלקים," see Sarah Klein-Braslavy, *פירוש הרמב"ם לסיפור בריאת העולם* (Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 203-16. However, as pointed out by Chaim Shine, *אדם חברה ומשפט בהגותו של רבי עובדיה ספורנו* (Tel Aviv, 2001), pp. 113-14, Maimonides maintains that *Adam ha-Rishon* was created with a fully actualized intellect, on par with the level which Moshe Rabbenu attained (cf. Caspi's interpretation of Maimonides, *Guide*, 1:1, cited in Klein-Braslavy, *ibid.*, pp. 211-12), while Sforno determines that even this first human was only created with a potential to acquire cognitive knowledge of God and to be able to learn to fear and love Him; this potential would have to be realized through active effort.

⁷³ See Sforno's analysis of Gen. 1:26, 27; compare Yehudah Cooperman's illuminating notes on Sforno's commentaries, *פרוש ספורנו על התורה השלם והמבאר* (Jerusalem, 1992), I:20-21, on Gen. 1:26-27. For a broad discussion of Sforno's analysis of the Akedah episode, see Michael Gross, "פירוש רבנו עובדיה ספורנו לעקדת יצחק," *10 מורשתנו* (1996): 103-115, especially pp. 108-10. Note that Sforno emphasizes a complete Jew is one who not only contemplates God cognitively but strives to emulate God through action and proper implementation of his free will and choice to fulfill God's commandments. Cf. Sforno on Exod. 25:37; Lev. 11:45; 13:47; 26:3; commentary on *Avot*, 3:19, as well as his treatise, *כונת התורה*, in Ze'ev Gottlieb, ed., *ביאור על התורה לרבי עובדיה ספורנו*, 5th edn. (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1992), pp. 371-372. In these latter references, Sforno emphasizes the melding of עיון and מעשה to be a complete Torah Jew. On this aspect of Sforno's philosophy, see Shine, *אדם חברה ומשפט*, pp. 152-167.

⁷⁴ However, the translation of the *Jewish Study Bible*, eds. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford/New York, 2004), p. 45, renders "יחידך" as "your favored one," and this nuance will become apparent as well in the ensuing discussion.

(Gen. 22:2). Having just expelled Ishmael, an act that which required him to quell his emotional bond to his firstborn and heed the command of God (and Sarah's demand), Avraham is now being asked to offer up his only remaining son who represented his hope for the perpetuation of his legacy, both physical and spiritual. Reminding Avraham of Isaac's status, God, as Ramban explains, adopts a style that is intended to "intensify the magnitude of the commandment."⁷⁵

Rashi, however, based on midrashic expansion of this dialogue scene, maintains that each description was in response to Avraham's reaction to God's words.

Your son: Avraham said to God: But, I have two sons. God answered him: your only son. Avraham responded: This one is the only son of his mother and the other is the only son of his mother. God then said: whom you love. Avraham replied: I love both of them. Then God said: Isaac.

Rashi, Gen. 22:2

את בנך - אמר לו שני בנים יש לי, אמר לו את יחידך, אמר לו זה יחיד לאמו וזה יחיד לאמו, אמר לו אשר אהבת, אמר לו שניהם אני אוהב, אמר לו את יצחק. ולמה לא גילה לו מתחלה, שלא לערבבו פתאום, ותזוז דעתו עליו ותטרף, וכדי לחבב עליו את המצוה וליתן לו שכר על כל דבור ודבור:
רש"י בראשית כב:ב

Rashi's analysis illuminates even more acutely that Avraham still regarded himself as a father to *two* children, whom he still *loved*, and this emotional attachment to both of his sons weighed heavily on his psyche. Although Ishmael has been cast out from his household, this midrash teaches that Avraham still carries his love for Ishmael in his heart, making it harder for him to initially comprehend what God is now asking of him in relation to Isaac. Nevertheless, Rashi explains that Avraham is not immediately told Isaac is the object of the command "so as not to confuse him suddenly lest his mind become distracted and bewildered."⁷⁶ By drawing out Avraham's feelings and compelling him to acknowledge them verbally with regard to his connection to his two sons, God wants Avraham to realize the full ramifications of his fulfillment of this command. Avraham's emotional and cognitive faculties must work in tandem to achieve the goals of this challenge.

This psychological and intellectual understanding follows on the heels of the motivator for this Akedah challenge, as expressed through another midrash cited by Rashi. The introductory phrase, "ויהי אחר הדברים האלה" (Gen. 22:1) which sets the stage for the "test" command, is rendered to refer to *the words* (דבר/דיבור) of the Satan, who challenges that the patriarch has become so preoccupied with the joy of his new son, Isaac, he has forsaken his devotion to God.⁷⁷ God therefore sets out to prove that Avraham can engage himself completely, heart and mind, in his fulfillment of God's commands, despite the challenges they demand.

Once Avraham understands intellectually and apprehends emotionally the task that lies ahead, he no longer speaks. Speech is now replaced by action, as related through a successive chain of verbal clauses: "Avraham **woke up early** in the morning and he **saddled** his donkey; he **took** his two lads with him and Isaac *his son*; he **split** the wood for the burnt offering; he **stood up** and **went** to the place of which God had told him" (Gen. 22:3). This seemingly detailed description of mundane activities has great literary significance. Avraham attends to the minutiae of the

⁷⁵ Ramban, Gen. 22:2.

⁷⁶ See Rashi, *ibid.*, based on the version of this midrashic analysis in *b. Sanhedrin* 89b.

⁷⁷ See Rashi, Gen. 22:1, based on *b. Sanhedrin* 89b.

fulfillment of the command. His physical faculties are completely attuned to carrying out the challenge properly; his whole being is mobilized into action.⁷⁸

It is only on the third day that Avraham lifts up his eyes and perceives the designated place of sacrifice from a distance (Gen. 22:4). Rashi informs that this long journey was intended once again to delay the inevitable, in order to ensure that Avraham acts with full cognition and recognition of what he is about to do, completely engaged with all of his psyche in the fulfillment of this trial.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Avraham's internal deliberations are not articulated within the biblical text. The reader of this narrative remains focused, as does Avraham, on the objective at hand. Avraham walks for three long days, each step demonstrating how action mirrors intent.⁸⁰ While there may have been doubts, hesitations, debates within, Avraham suppresses them all; he arrives, lifts up his eyes, and proceeds in the direction to which God guides him. His eyes do not cause him to stray, nor does his heart. He is fully absorbed in his intent to accomplish the goal.⁸¹ Once again, detailed actions are related to maintain focus; there is no diversion: "Avraham took the wood for the offering and placed it on Isaac *his son*. He took in his hand the firestone and the knife and they both **walked** together (וילכו שניהם יחדו)" [Gen. 22:6].

When speech does impede on the flow of action as father and son walk step by step to the altar site, Avraham demonstrates that he has fully digested what is being asked of him, and, as Rashi points out, Isaac also gains understanding and willingly participates in the accomplishment of God's command.

Isaac said to Avraham his father. He said: My father. He answered: Here I am, my son. He said: Here are the firestone and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering? Avraham said: God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son. And the two of them walked together

Gen. 22:7-8

ויאמר יצחק אל אברהם אביו ויאמר
אבי ויאמר הנני בני ויאמר הנה
האש והעצים ואיה השה לעלה:
ויאמר אברהם אלהים יראה לו השה
לעלה בני וילכו שניהם יחדו:
בראשית כב:ז-ח

⁷⁸ Compare Rashi, Gen. 22:3, who notes that Scripture's reference to waking up in the morning signals his diligence in the performance of this commandment, as does his insistence on saddling his own donkey. Cf. Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in idem, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Culture*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), p. 10, who observes that "early in the morning" signifies "the resolution, the promptness, the punctual obedience of the sorely tried Abraham." Auerbach explains that this action and others in this episode demonstrate how this narrative is "fraught with background" (ibid., p. 12), as one cannot comprehend the depth of Abraham's commitment to fulfill God's will without taking into account that Abraham acts in full awareness of all that God has done for him and expects from him; as Auerbach notes, ibid., p. 12, "... his [Abraham's] silent obedience is multilayered, has background." Compare Nehama Leibowitz, *עיונים בספר בראשית* (Jerusalem: ha-Histadrut ha-Ziyyonit ha-Olamit, 1969), pp. 138-40, who applies Auerbach's analysis to her discussion of the midrashic interpretations of this episode.

⁷⁹ Rashi, Gen. 22:4. Compare Radak's parallel analysis in his commentary on Gen. 22:2.

⁸⁰ Cf. Rashi, Gen. 22:2, who indicates that God did not reveal the destination initially so that each step would increase Avraham's merit and his reward.

⁸¹ Compare Auerbach's analysis of this scene, ibid., pp. 9-12. As he notes, pp. 9-10, "[I]t is as if, while he traveled on, Abraham had looked neither to the right nor to the left . . ."

Rashi: *And even though Isaac understood that he would be slaughtered, they both walked together, with the same ready heart.*⁸²

רש"י: ואף על פי שהבין יצחק שהוא הולך לישחט, וילכו שניהם יחדו בלב שוה:

Scripture's insistent reiteration of the father/son relationship through redundant epithets accentuates how Avraham, and his beloved son, Isaac, immerse themselves wholeheartedly in their devotion to God and His will.

The physical activities of preparing and setting out to perform the sacrifice, as related in 22:9-10, aim to engage all of Avraham's physical and sensory capacities in bringing forth intent into action. This is especially apparent in the binding of Isaac on the altar - אתו ויעקד את יצחק בנו וישם - על המזבח ממעל לעצים. With each twist of the rope and the subsequent placing of the bound Isaac on top of the wood for burning, the tactile sensation gives way to a figurative binding between father and son for the cooperative purpose of doing what God wants of them. As Avraham lifts his hand, knife pointed to slaughter his son, his task is completed: He has engaged all of the physical, emotional, and cognitive facets of his being in his commitment to God's will. His internal and external faculties are unified in the accomplishment of this divine objective. Avraham has proven himself to be one "who fears God" (Gen. 22:12), both in intent and action, demonstrating his willingness to part with that which he cherishes most, his son, to confirm his unwavering commitment to God.

While Avraham sacrifices a ram in place of Isaac, he has already taught future generations what the meaning of "sacrifice" truly is. Concerning the command of sacrifices in *Sefer Va-Yikra*, Ramban observes that all of one's faculties- intellectual, emotional, and physical- must be attuned to the symbolism of the sacrifice in order for it to bring about atonement. As Ramban explains,

Since the deeds of man are actualized through thought, speech, and action, God commanded that when a person sins, he shall bring a sacrifice. He shall lean his hands on it, corresponding to action; he shall confess with his mouth, corresponding to speech; he shall burn by fire the innards and the kidneys, which are organs of thought and desire; and the legs [shall be burned], correlating to the person's hands and feet which perform all of the work. He shall sprinkle the blood on the altar, paralleling the blood of his life. This is in order that the individual performing all of this should reflect that he sinned to his God with his body and his soul and it was appropriate that his blood should have been spilled and his body should have been burned, were it not for God's kindness who took from him a replacement and a ransom with this sacrifice, such that its blood is in place of his blood, a life for a life, the extremities of the limbs of the sacrifice parallel to the extremities of his own limbs.

Ramban, Lev. 1:9⁸³

כי בעבור שמעשי בני אדם נגמרים במחשבה ובדבור ובמעשה, צוה השם כי כאשר יחטא יביא קרבן, יסמוך ידיו עליו כנגד המעשה, ויתודה בפיו כנגד הדבור, וישרוף באש הקרב והכליות שהם כלי המחשבה והתאוה, והכרעים כנגד ידיו ורגליו של אדם העושים כל מלאכתו, ויזרוק הדם על המזבח כנגד דמו בנפשו, כדי שיחשוב אדם בעשותו כל אלה כי חטא לאלהיו בגופו ובנפשו, וראוי לו שישפך דמו וישרף גופו לולא חסד הבורא שלקח ממנו תמורה וכפר הקרבן הזה שיהא דמו תחת דמו, נפש תחת נפש, וראשי אברי הקרבן כנגד ראשי אבריו.

רמב"ן ויקרא א:ט

⁸² Rashi, Gen. 22:8; compare his comments on 22:7, in which the same phrase, "They walked together," indicates that Avraham goes willingly to fulfill God's command. See as well Radak's parallel analysis on Gen. 22:8.

Rendering the meaning of the Hebrew term for atonement, "כפרה," from the term for ransom, "כופר," Ramban compels the reader of his commentary to visualize in a graphic manner the entire sacrificial ritual as a step by step process which aims to engage all of a person's being, in all of its facets, so that atonement can be achieved by a symbolic expression of absolute commitment to God. Those components of the human being which worked against God's will initially must now be purified and guided to serve God in the future.

This is the message that Isaiah sends to *Bnei Yisrael* in relation to the ritual of fasting. In the *Haftarah* for Yom Kippur, Isaiah describes the moral and spiritual hypocrisy that was sickening the nation. Befuddled by God's lack of attentiveness to his nation, God answers through Isaiah:

Because on your fast day you see to your business and oppress your laborers. Because you fast in strife and contention, and you strike with a wicked fist. Your fasting today is not such as to make your voice heard on high ... This is the fast that I [God] desire: to unlock fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free ... It is to share your bread with the hungry and to take the wretched poor into your home. When you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to ignore your own kin.

Isa. 58:3-7⁸⁴

ביום צמכם תמצאו הפץ וכל עצביכם
תנגשו: הן לריב ומצה תצומו ולהכות
באגרף רשע לא תצומו כיום
להשמיע במרום קולכם: ... הלוא זה
צום אבחרהו פתח חרצבות רשע
התר אגדות מוטה ושלה רצוצים
חפשים ... הלוא פרס לרעב לחמך
ועניים מרודים תביא בית כי תראה
ערם וכסיתו ומבשרך לא תתעלם:
ישעיהו נח:ג-ז

Isaiah chastises Israel that they are not engaging all of their capacities for one positive purpose. They use some of their faculties to appear as if they are committed to God, through the ritual of fasting, but they act in a contrary manner to this professed spirituality. God demands that in order to achieve atonement, every action has to correspond to one collective goal. Morality between man and man, and ritual between man and God, must mirror one another and represent true righteousness.

As we embark on our *teshuvah* process during the Yamim Nor'aim, we need to reflect whether we are using all of our God-given faculties - cognitive, emotional and physical - to fulfill the purpose for which we are created: to become as divine-like as possible. In actuality, every day is a challenge for all of us. Every day is a trial and a test to determine whether we will use all of our capacities to become closer to God. When we read about the Akedah narrative on Rosh ha-Shanah, we need to imagine ourselves as Avraham and Isaac, rising to the challenge that each and every one of us, in our own way, faces each day- to realize our potential by applying the entirety of our beings to fulfill the Torah and mitzvot. The Yamim Nora'im provide us with the opportunity to take account of the past year's experiences and plan for the coming year. If we truly absorb the message of the Akedah and contemplate how to make our lives more fulfilling as Torah Jews, then God will, א"י, open the gates of heaven and allow our voices of prayer to reach up to His throne. May God grant everyone a *Shanah Tovah!*

⁸³ Compare Ramban's discussion in *תורת ה' תמימה*, in Chaim Chavel, ed., *כתבי רבינו משה בן נחמן* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1963), I:164-65, citing Ibn Ezra's commentary as the source for his analysis; cf. Ibn Ezra, Lev. 1:1.

⁸⁴ Translation of these verses from Isaiah, 58:3-7 derives from Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 900.