

## Rosh Hashannah Second Day

In the calendar cycle, some days always carry strong emotions for me.

Some are joyful, like birthdays and anniversaries; some are reflective like the yahrzeit for departed relatives and friends. But today, the second day of Rosh Hashannah, is invariably the one day that fills me with anxiety every year.

The reason is that for each of the past 50 years, at this hour on the second day of RH, I have stood up and faced full congregations to chant the story of the Akeda and the long and troubling journey of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. Some of my anxiety comes from the text and my re-creating the violence in the story and stirs up my personal memories of both the love and fear I felt when I walked as a child with my own father. My own doubts as the representative and voice of the Kahal come to the anxious surface as well: Did I practice enough? Will I have laryngitis? Will I remember and pronounce each word correctly? Will I remember that these are the special German high holiday tropes, rather than the Purim tropes that inexplicably emerged one year? Will I start on the right note? But this year feels different for me. Instead of the scroll, I will have the Chumash with all of the words and vowels in the written text and tropes in front of

me. I will even have a pitch pipe and know which note to start with, and it should be an easy read through the Akedah this afternoon.

But something significant will be missing for me this year. This will sound unusual coming from a life-long vegetarian, but I will miss the animality of the Torah service. I will miss unrolling the Torah scroll and taking in the animal scent of the scroll; I will miss touching the yad to animal parchment whose sheets are connected by animal tendons; I will miss reading the letters of the Torah, written by a scribe with special ink at the tip of an animal feather. I will miss holding the wooden scroll holders, the Eitz Chaim, that surround the parchment and speak to life and the living. And I will miss chanting from the scroll the sacrifice of the ram in place of Isaac as well as holding and listening to the shofar, the ram's horn, another animal symbol that punctuates the end of the Torah service.

So how will I make it all work? I will remember. I will remember how our ancestors showed us a way to adapt and create new traditions and retain the spiritual connection in the face of circumstances out of their control. I will remember the spirit of Yavneh, and our ancestors who found a path to

a service-based practices without a temple and animal sacrifices. And I will remember the spirit of the poor Jewish souls who, while imprisoned in concentration camps, found ways to recreate the Rosh Hashannah service and the reading of the Akedah without Torah scrolls, grateful that despite all, they could live through and celebrate another new year. With our ancestors pointing the way for us, I will offer a heartfelt substitute from the Chumash that will carry along the spirit of the Akedah. Even as I long for the animality of the scroll, I will be grateful that we too have lived through our own challenges, fears and hardships to celebrate another year together.

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