

**Good Yom Tov Everyone.** *“And so it happened after these things that Hashem tested Avrohom and said to him, ‘Avrohom.’ And he [Avrohom] replied ‘Here I am.’ And He [Hashem] said, ‘Please take your son, your only one, whom you love - Yitzchok - and get yourself to the Land of Moriah; bring him [Yitzchok] up there as an offering, upon one of the mountains, which I shall indicate to you.”* (Bereishis 22:1-2) *“And Avrohom took the wood for the offering, and placed it on Yitzchok, his son. He took the fire pan and the knife, and the two of them went together.”* (Bereishis 22:6)

*“Avrohom built the altar there, and arranged the wood; he bound Yitzchok, his son, and he placed him on the altar atop the wood. Avrohom stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slaughter his son. And an angel of Hashem called to him from heaven, and said, ‘Avrohom! Avrohom!’ And he [Avrohom] replied ‘Here I am.’ And he [the angel] said, ‘Do not stretch out your hand against the lad nor do anything to him, for now I know that you are a G-d fearing man, since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from Me.”* (Bereishis 22:9-12)

Avrohom was faced with the ultimate test in life: to sacrifice his beloved son Yitzchok for the sake of Heaven. Hashem tested Avrohom to see if Avrohom would put the will of Heaven above his individual feelings for his son Yitzchok. This is the essence of a Jew, putting Hashem's will before his own. This is why we read the parsha of the binding of Yitzchok on Rosh HaShana.

Just as Hashem tested Avrohom, Hashem tests us everyday to see what our priorities are. Do we selfishly serve ourselves or do we serve Hashem? Avrohom Avinu was willing to sacrifice his son to serve Hashem. How much are we willing to sacrifice for Hashem? Hashem does not ask very much from us. Are we willing to take a few more minutes to say blessings over food? Are we willing to talk less with our friends and use that time to learn more Torah or put on tefillin? Are we willing to open up our wallets to donate to a worthy tzedakah cause?

Very often we hear people say: *“Don’t bother me now, I am busy now earning a living.”* Or, *“Please! I’m trying to eat right now. I want to take a nap now. Excuse me! I just have to do this for myself.”* How often does a person approach his Yiddishkeit with the attitude of *“Hashem needs this now. Hashem wants this. I just have to do this for Hashem?”* Think about how spiritually uplifting and rewarding the coming year will be if we make Hashem's will our will. The question we therefore ask ourselves on this Rosh Hashana is the following: **In the coming year will I serve myself or will I serve Hashem?**

One of the most stirring moments of the Rosh Hashana prayers is the Unesaneh Tokef prayer. Written by Rav Amnon of Mainz, Germany about 1000 years ago, Unesaneh Tokef has become one of the high points of the chazan’s repetition of the Musaf Amidah on both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The following amazing account is the true story behind this awesome prayer; it is a story which shows how one Jew put Hashem first.

The bishop of Mainz insisted that his Jewish friend and advisor Rav Amnon convert and join the church. In those days in Europe, the Jews lived at the mercy of the powerful church. Rav Amnon realized the seriousness of the situation; his life was in the balance. Nevertheless, Rav Amnon wanted to buy some time. So he asked the bishop for three days of grace to consider the proposition of converting. After leaving the bishop's palace, Rav Amnon became distraught at having given the impression that he even considered for a moment betraying Hashem.

Rav Amnon spent three days in solitude, fasting and praying to be forgiven for his sin of considering joining the church. Rav Amnon did not return to the bishop after the three days of fasting. When Rav Amnon did not arrive, the bishop’s agents brought Rav Amnon before the bishop. The bishop demanded an answer.

Rav Amnon replied that his tongue should be cut out for the sin of saying that he would consider converting. The bishop was furious. The bishop said that the sin was not in what Rav Amnon said, but rather the sin was in Rav Amnon’s legs for not bringing him to the bishop as Rav Amnon had promised. The bishop ordered that his former friend Rav Amnon’s legs be chopped off, joint by joint.

The bishop’s agents did the same to Rav Amnon’s hands. After each amputation, Rav Amnon was asked if he would convert, and each time he refused. Then the bishop ordered that Rav Amnon be carried home, a maimed and mutilated cripple, together with his amputated parts.

When Rosh Hashana arrived a few days later, Rav Amnon asked to be carried before the Aron haKodesh in the shul. Before the congregation recited Kedusha, Rav Amnon asked to be allowed to sanctify Hashem’s name in the shul as he had done in the bishop’s palace. Rav Amnon then said his prayer *“Unesaneh Tokef... Let us now relate the power of this day’s holiness, for it is awesome and frightening...”* After completing the prayer, Rav Amnon died on the spot.

Three days later, Rav Amnon appeared in a dream to Rav Klonimos ben Meshullam, a great Talmudic and Kabbalistic scholar of Mainz. In the dream, Rav Amnon taught the entire text of the Unesaneh Tokef prayer to Rav Klonimos. Rav Amnon asked that the prayer be sent to all parts of the Jewish world and be inserted into the service. His wish was carried out, and the prayer became an integral part of the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur prayers. (Machzor Zichron Moshe - Artscroll, p.476-7 citing Ohr Zarua)

Rav Amnon gave up his limbs and then his life rather than betray Hashem. Avrohom Avinu was willing to sacrifice his son to serve Hashem. How much are we willing to sacrifice for Hashem? In order for this year to be truly a year of sweetness, happiness and goodness, we must commit ourselves to serving Hashem, instead of serving ourselves. **Good Yom Tov Everyone. Kesivah v’Chasimah Tovah**