As we come once again to the Festival of Yom Teruah, we are reminded of the opportunity to “begin again,” to reflect on the past year and make changes for the coming year. The sound of the Shofar reminds us that our King is returning—that our redemption draws nigh, and that we have been chosen and equipped to accomplish important tasks on His behalf.

As I meditated again on the many lessons we learn as we celebrate this appointed time of our Lord, I was drawn to the traditional readings of Genesis 21 and 22, texts that have been read throughout the centuries on this awesome and joyous day. And once again, I was struck with the repeated “Here I am,” voiced by Abraham in the story of the Akedah (Binding of Isaac). I was challenged to emulate Abraham’s walk of faith, and I hope you are likewise challenged.

The first time we encounter Abraham saying “Here I am” (הִנֵּנִי, hineini) is in the opening verse of Genesis 22:

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am” (הִנֵּנִי, hineini).

The opening of the story makes it clear that God had come to test Abraham. The simplicity of the opening sentence, however, seems to indicate that God came to him as He had before—not with thunder and lightning (which one might think would appropriate for the unbelievable test that was about to be issued)—but with a simple vocative: “Abraham.” What is more, Abraham is not startled by God’s address, but answers with “Here I am,” hineini. As I contemplated this, I realized that Abraham was used to walking with God and communicating with Him. His faith was not “ratcheted up” just for special occasions, but was the normal state of affairs. Abraham lived a life of faith that was consistent so that whenever God called him, he was ready: “Here I am,” hineini.

What is more, Abraham’s ready response, “Here I am,” bespeaks his willingness to listen and obey. “Here I am” does not mean “what do you want?” or just a simple “Hi.” No, it means “Here I am, ready to listen and obey.” This kind of faith and faithfulness is the result of a consistent fostering of love for God through regular prayer, meditation upon God’s word, and fellowship with others of like faith and practice.

The second time we hear Abraham responding with hineini is in v. 7. The two of them, Abraham and Isaac, have left the young men behind and are heading toward the top of Mt. Moriah. Isaac still does not know the extent of the test God was bringing upon them both, so he makes the obvious inquiry:

Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham’s answer is prophetic:

Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

It is impossible to put ourselves in Abraham’s place in order to understand the whirlwind of emotions that must have been raging within his soul. Yet when Isaac inquires, Abraham answers with the simple hineini, “Here I am, ready to respond to you as your loving father.” I could not help but consider that these two hineinis model the two halves of the Ten Words. Abraham first responds to God, and then to his son—he demonstrates his love for God and for his neighbor. No one would have blamed Abraham if he had be absorbed with his own plight, for how
could a father who loves his son even imagine doing what he was about to do? Anyone would understand if Abra-
ham had responded: “Son, I’ve got a lot on my mind right now, so please don’t bother me with questions.” But he
does not. Abraham has so committed himself to God in faith that he is able to be attentive to the needs of others.
His love for God gives him the ability to love his neighbor as well.

The final “Here I am” is at the climax of the story. The stones have been gathered for the altar, the wood laid
upon it, and Isaac bound upon the wood. With the knife in hand, Abraham is about to obey God in this most
unique and awful test. As he raises the knife, the Angel of Adonai calls forth from heaven (v. 11):

But the angel of Adonai called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I
am.”

It was Abraham’s consistent walk of faith—learning to say “Here I am, ready to listen and obey,” that had fit him
to make a similar response at the moment of his greatest struggle. Learning to say “Here I am” whenever God
called had become the normal way of life for Abraham, and how fortunate! For even though one could imagine
that the crescendoed beating of his heart might have drowned out all else, the ear trained by faith heard the call of
God and immediately responded, hineini, “Here I am, ready and willing.” Learning to walk with God as the nor-
mal life of faith makes us ready to hear Him when He speaks words of mercy and salvation, even in times of life’s
deepest struggles.

The Torah teaches us that Yom Teruah is a “reminder by blowing of trumpets” (Lev 23:24). The fact that the
shofar is a ram’s horn tied the festival to the story of the Akedah, for the ram that substituted as a sacrifice in
Isaac’s place was caught in the thicket by his horns. So what are we to remember as we listen to the shofar blasts
on Yom Teruah? First, and foremost, we reflect upon the Son Who was not spared, even Yeshua our Messiah:

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely
give us all things? (Rom 8:32)

Surely Paul had the binding of Isaac in mind when he penned this verse. On Yom Teruah, we remember the son
who was spared, and the One Who was not. And as we contemplate that He was “delivered over for us all,” we
are reminded that if God’s love is of this magnitude, to deliver up His Son on our behalf, then surely He will do
all that is necessary to bring us to Himself. Our lives are secure in Him.

Second, we are reminded that as we walk a life of faith and faithfulness, we become ever more attentive to the
call of God upon our lives, ready to respond with “Here I am, ready and willing to do what You say.”

Finally, we are reminded by the sound of the Shofar on this day that standing righteous before God is a gift of
highest value, a gift that enables us to see His glory shining in the face of our Messiah, Yeshua (2Cor 4:6).

How blessed are the people who know the Shofar sound!

O Adonai, they walk in the light of Your face.
In Your name they rejoice all the day,
and by Your righteousness they are exalted.

Psalm 89:15–16