



ROSH HASHANAH 5782/2021

אָנִי יְשָׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֹר

קוֹל דּוּדֵי דוֹפֵק

פִּתְחִי-לִי אַחֲתִי רַעֲיָתִי יוֹנָתִי תַמָּתִי
שְׂרָאשִׁי נִמְלֵא-טָל קְנֻצוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לַיְלָה:

I am asleep, but my heart is awake.

The sound of my beloved knocking!

“Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my faultless one!
For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of night.”

Ani y'sheinah v'libi er

Kol dodi dofek

Pithi li ahoti rayati yonati tamati

Sh'roshi nimla-tal k'vutzotai r'sisei lailah

(Song of Songs 5:2)

CLASSICAL MIDRASHIM AND COMMENTARIES

Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:2(1)

אני ישנה, אמרה כנסת ישראל לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, רבנו של עולם
אני ישנה מן המצוות, ולבי ער לגמילות חסדים.
אני ישנה מן הצדקות, ולבי ער לעשותן.
אני ישנה מן הקרבנות, ולבי ער לקריאת שמע ותפלה.
אני ישנה מבית המקדש, ולבי ער לבתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות.
אני ישנה מן הקץ, ולבי ער לגאולה.
אני ישנה מן הגאולה, ולבו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ער לגאולני.
אמר רבי חייא בר אבא איכן מצינו שנקרא הקדוש ברוך הוא לבן של ישראל, מן הדיו קרא, דכתיב
(תהלים עג, כו): צור לבבי וחלקי אלהים לעולם.

"I am asleep." The Community of Israel said before the Holy Blessed One:

Sovereign of the Universe!

I am asleep in the neglect of mitzvot, but my heart is awake for deeds of kindness.

I am asleep in respect of righteous deeds, but my heart is awake [in the desire] to do them.

I am asleep in respect of the sacrifices, but my heart is awake for praying the Shma and Amidah.

I am asleep in respect of the Temple, but my heart is awake for synagogues and houses of study.

I am asleep in respect of the end, but my heart is awake for the redemption.

I am asleep in respect of the redemption, but the heart of the Holy Blessed One is awake to redeem me.'

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said: Where do we find that God is called the 'heart' of Israel? In the following verse: "God is the rock, my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 73:26).

Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Toldot 18:1

אני ישנה ולבי ער (שה"ש ה ב). שאמרה כנסת ישראל לפני הקב"ה, רבון העולמים
אני ישנה מבית המקדש, ולבי ער בבתי כנסיות ובבתי מדרשות.
אני ישנה מן הקרבנות, ולבי ער במצות ובצדקות.
אני ישנה מן המצוות, ולבי ער לעשותם.
אני ישנה מן הקץ, ולבי ער לגאולה.
אני ישנה מן הגאולה, ולבי ער להקב"ה (עד) שיגאלני.
אמר ר' חייא בר אבא (היאך) [היכן] מצינו שנקרא הקב"ה לבן של ישראל, מן המקרא הזה צור לבבי
וחלקי אלהים לעולם (תהלים עג כו)....

I AM ASLEEP, BUT MY HEART IS AWAKE.

The Congregation of Israel said to the Holy Blessed One: Sovereign of the Universe,

I sleep without the Holy Temple, but my heart is awake in the synagogues and in the academies.

I sleep without the sacrifices, but my heart is awake in the commandments and almsgiving.

I sleep without the good deeds, but my heart is awake for performing them.

I sleep without the end time, but my heart is awake for the redemption.

I sleep without the redemption, but my heart is awake for the Holy One when he redeems me....

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said: Where do we find that the Holy Blessed One is called the 'heart' of Israel? In the following verse: "God is the rock, my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 73:26)...

Pesikta D'Rav Kahanna 5:6

אני ישנה ולבי ער קול דודי דופק פתחי לי וג' (שה"ש ה:ב).
אמרה כנסת ישראל לפני הקב"ה, רבון העולמים,
אני ישנה מבית המקדש ולבי ער בבתי כנסיות ובבתי מדרשות,
אני ישנה מן הקרבנות ולבי ער במצות וצדקות,
אני ישנה מן המצות ולבי ער לעשותן,
אני ישנה מן הקץ ולבי ער לגאולה,
אני ישנה מן הגאולה ולבו של הקב"ה ער לגאלינו.
א"ר חייא בר אבא מאיכן מצאינו שנקרא הק' ליבן של ישראל, מן הדה דכת' צור לבבי וחלקי אלהים
לעולם (תהלים עג:כו).

I AM ASLEEP, BUT MY HEART IS AWAKE.

The Congregation of Israel said to the Holy Blessed One: Sovereign of the Universe,
I sleep without the Holy Temple, but my heart is awake in the synagogues and houses of study.
I sleep without the sacrifices, but my heart is awake in mitzvot and tzedakot
I sleep without the mitzvot, but my heart is awake for performing them.
I sleep without the end time, but my heart is awake for the redemption.
I sleep without the redemption, but the heart of the Holy Blessed One is awake to redeem me.'
Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba said: Where do we find that the Holy Blessed One is called the 'heart' of Israel? In
the following verse: "God is the rock, my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 73:26)...

Pesikta D'Rav Kahanna 5:6

ר' ינאי או' תומייתי, לא אני גדול ממנה ולא היא גדולה ממני. ר' יהושע דסכנין בשם ר' לוי מה
התאומים הלילו חשש אחד מהם את ראשו חבירו מרגיש, כך א' הקב"ה עמו אנכי בצרה (תהלים
צא:טו).

Rabbai Yannai said [on *tamati*]: "My twin." I am not greater than she, and she is not greater than me.
Rabbi Yehoshua of Sikhnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: Just as with twins, if the head of one hurts,
the other feels it, so the Holy Blessed One says, "I am with him in suffering." (Ps 91:15)

MEDIEVAL MIDRASHIM AND COMMENTARIES

Midrash Lekach Tov on Song of Songs 5:2:1

אני ישנה ולבי ער. אמרה כנסת ישראל אני ישנה במלכויות כאדם שעברו עליו הרבה צרות ומתוך הצרות נפלה עליו תרדמה ויישן לו. כך ישראל בגלות כשינים ואינם יודעים מאי זו מדרגה ירדו ואלה הם צועקים לאלהים בחזקה אולי ירחם עליהם להשיבם למלכותם הראשונה לכך הנביא או' לה לכנסת ישראל "שמעי נא זאת עניה ושכורה ולא מייך" ולבי ער. זה הקב"ה כענין שנ' צור לבבי וחלקי אלהים לעולם. והוא ישתבח שמו לעד ולנצח נצחים וישועתו תדירה עלינו שנ' הנה לא ינום ולא יישן שומר ישראל.

"I am asleep but my heart is awake." The Community of Israel said, I am asleep with regard to sovereignty (my stature - possibly self-possession or control over myself), **like a person upon whom came many troubles, and as a result of those troubles, a deep slumber came upon him and caused him to sleep.** So too Israel in exile where like they were sleeping, and they didn't know the level to which they had sunk, and that if they cried out strongly to God, perhaps God would have compassion on them and restore them to their earlier stature. Therefore the prophet said to the Community of Israel, "Listen to this, unhappy one, Who are drunk, but not with wine!" (Isa. 51:21).¹ But my heart is awake, this is the Holy Blessed One, as it says, "God, the rock, is my heart and my portion, forever" (Ps. 73:26). For God, may God's name be praised forever, and God's salvation be always upon us, as it says, "See the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps."

Rashi on Song of Songs 5:2

אני ישנה. כְּשֶׁהֵייתִי שְׁלֵמָה וְשִׁקְטָה בְּבֵית רֵאשׁוֹן, נוֹאֲשֵׁתִי מֵעֲבֹד הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כִּי־שָׁנָה וְנִרְדָּמְתִּי: בּוֹלְבִי עֵר. זֶה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא. כִּךְ נִדְרַשׁ בְּפִסְקֵי־תַא: גּוֹלְבִי עֵר. הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁהוּא צוֹר לְבָבִי וְחֻלְקֵי עֵר לְשִׁמְרָנִי וְלִהְיִטִּיב לִי:

"I slept." When I was confident and calm in the first Beit Hamikdash, I despaired of worshipping the Holy Blessed One, as one who slumbers and falls fast asleep...

1. Isaiah 51:21-23

לְכוּ שְׁמַעֲיֵנָה זֹאת עֲנִיָּה וְשִׁכְרָת וְלֹא מַיִן: כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי ה' וְאֵלֵהֶן יָרִיב עִמּוֹ הִנֵּה לִקְחֹתִי מִיָּדְךָ אֶת־כּוֹס הַתִּרְעוּלָה אֶת־קַבְלֶעֶת כּוֹס חֲמֹתִי לֹא־תוֹסִיפִי לְשִׁתּוֹתָהּ עוֹד: וְשִׁמְתִּיהָ בְּיַד־מוֹלִיךְ אֲשֶׁר־אָמְרוּ לְנַפְשֶׁךָ שְׁחִי וְנַעֲבְרָה וְתִשְׁמָכִי כְּאֶרֶץ גּוֹד וְכַחוּץ לַעֲבָרִים: Therefore, Listen to this, unhappy one, Who are drunk, but not with wine! Thus said Adonai, your Lord, Your God who champions [God's] people: Herewith I take from your hand the cup of reeling, the bowl, the cup of My wrath; you shall never drink it again. I will put it in the hands of your tormentors, who have commanded you, "Get down, that we may walk over you"— So that you made your back like the ground, Like a street for passersby.

Isaiah 52:1-2

עוּרִי עוּרִי לְבָשִׂי עֲצֵךְ צִיּוֹן לְבָשִׂי | בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרְתֶךָ יְרוּשָׁלַם עִיר הַקְּדוֹשׁ כִּי לֹא יוֹסִיף יְבֹא־בְךָ עוֹד עַרְל וְטָמֵא: הִתְנַעֲרִי מֵעַפְרֵךְ קוּמִי שְׁבִי יְרוּשָׁלַם הַתְּפִתְחוּ [הַתְּפִתְחִיל] מוֹסְרֵי צִנְאוֹךָ שְׁבִיָּה בַת־צִיּוֹן: Awake, awake, O Zion! Clothe yourself in splendor; Put on your robes of majesty, Jerusalem, holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean Shall never enter you again. Arise, shake off the dust, Sit [on your throne], Jerusalem! Loose the bonds from your neck, O captive one, Fair Zion!

Ibn Ezra on Song of Songs 5:2

והנה היא ראתה בחלום תמונת דודה ואמ' אני ישנה אע"פ שאני ישנה לבי ער וראיתי כאלו בא דודי:
אני ישנה. אמרה כנסת ישראל אע"פ שגליתי לבבל לבי ער עלי ולא עבדתי ע"ז:

Explanation 2: She saw in a dream the form of her Beloved, and she said, "I am asleep," i.e., even though I am asleep, my heart is awake, and I saw as if my Beloved were coming.

Explanation 3: "I am asleep." The Community of Israel said, even though I am exiled in Babylonia, my heart is awake within me, and I have not committed idolatry.

Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3, 51:11

When we have acquired a true knowledge of God, and rejoice in that knowledge in such a manner, that whilst speaking with others, or attending to our bodily wants, our mind is all that time with God; when we are with our heart constantly near God, even whilst our body is in the society of men; when we are in that state which the Song on the relation between God and man poetically describes in the following words: "**I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh**" (Song 5:2):—then we have attained not only the height of ordinary prophets, but of Moses, our Teacher...

When we therefore find [the patriarchs] also, engaged in ruling others, in increasing their property, and endeavouring to obtain possession of wealth and honour, we see in this fact a proof that when they were occupied in these things, only their bodily limbs were at work, whilst their heart and mind never moved away from the name of God.... I think these four reached that high degree of perfection in their relation to God, and enjoyed the continual presence of Divine Providence, even in their endeavours to increase their property, feeding the flock, toiling in the field, or managing the house, only because in all these things their end and aim was to approach God as much as possible...

But a person like myself must not imagine that he is able to lead men up to this degree of perfection. It is only the next degree to it that can be attained... And let us pray to God and beseech Him that He clear and remove from our way everything that forms an obstruction and a partition between us and Him, although most of these obstacles are our own creation, as has several times been shown in this treatise. (cf, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God," Isa. 59:2).

Yehudah HaLevi, Kuzari 2:24

Divine Providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first, if they had all willingly consented to return. But only a part was ready to do so, whilst the majority and the aristocracy remained in Babylon, preferring dependence and slavery, and unwilling to leave their houses and their affairs. An allusion to them might be found in the enigmatic words of Solomon: **I sleep, but my heart waketh (Song of Songs 5:2-4). He designates the exile by sleep, and the continuance of prophecy among them by the wakefulness of the heart. 'It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh' means God's call to return; 'My head is filled with dew' alludes to the Shekhinah which emerged from the shadow of the Temple. The words: 'I have put off my coat,' refer to the people's slothfulness in consenting to return. The sentence: 'My beloved stretcheth forth his hand through the opening'** may be interpreted as the urgent call of Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Prophets, until a portion of the people grudgingly responded to their invitation. In accordance with their mean mind they did not receive full measure. Divine Providence only gives man as much as he is prepared to receive; if his receptive capacity be small, he obtains little, and much if it be great. Were we prepared to meet the God of our forefathers with a pure mind, we should find the same salvation as our fathers did in Egypt...

CONTEMPORARY VOICES

Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler, *Strive for Truth*, part 2, tr. by Aryeh Carmell, p. 53

Everyone has free choice -- at the point where truth meets falsehood. In other words choice takes place at that point where the truth as the person sees it confronts the illusion produced in him by the power of falsehood. But the majority of a person's actions are undertaken without any clash between truth and falsehood taking place. Many of a person's actions may happen to coincide with what is objectively right because he has been brought up that way and it does not occur to him to do otherwise, and many bad and false decisions may be taken simply because the person does not realize that they are bad. In such cases no valid *be'hira*, or choice, has been made.

Rabbi David Jaffe, *Changing the World from the Inside Out*, pp. 84-85

Rabbi Dessler's innovation is that much of our behavior lies in the area of positive and negative habituation... Regarding certain issues, our habituation creates more sensitivity, and in others, less awareness.... Only at the edge of our habituation do we have a live option to consciously choose. According to Rabbi Dessler, while the point location is mostly beyond our control, nothing interferes with our ability to choose reality and truth as we know it in any situation. This idea of free will is closer to the determinists..., given all that we are learning about the brain and how much of our behavior is actually hardwired. We don't have an equally free choice over everything. In the white-privilege example above, I may not be at a point of choosing to be relaxed socially with people from that neighborhood, but it could be a live choice for me to read and learn more about their lives.²

Rabbi Dessler teaches that our choice point is always moving. When we make a positive choice, more of reality and truth in a particular area are now clear to us, and our next choice point will be in a more refined place. If we make a choice toward self-deception, our point moves in a direction of dulled awareness and less of the truth is clear to us.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto

[How do we build *zerizut*?] By awakening to the very many good things that the Holy One blessed by God does for you moment by moment

Rabbi Alan Morinis

Most often, we are in a state of indifference toward the goodness in our lives. It's not that it isn't there, it's just that you may not be paying attention to it because you're working at this, or trying to fix that, or holding together some other thing, and as you struggle with one challenge or another, you've got your eyes fixed on the goal, or maybe just the next steps you need to execute....

2. The author gives examples of habituation from his own upbringing: being habituated not to throw litter out of a car window ("I just never do it, and I don't need to think about it"), and a sensitivity to the environment. He also says he was habituated as a white person growing up in an affluent, white town "not to see or consider as important" the economic challenges of the majority Black and Latino communities in surrounding towns, which "just did not penetrate my awareness on a daily basis."

Alan Lew, *This Is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared*, pp. 83

We all share the same heart... Ordinarily we are taken in by the materialist myth of discrete being. We look like we are separate bodies. Physically we can see where one of us beings and another of us ends, but emotionally, spiritually, it simply isn't this way. Our feelings and our spiritual impulses flow freely beyond the boundaries of the self, and this is something that each of us knows intuitively for a certainty...

Deep down, we know this very well. But what we are usually not aware of is how much we feel other's pain and how much energy we waste trying to defend ourselves against it... We can't help feeling each other's pain. We all share the same heart. If someone else is suffering, there's no way we can shut it out. It spreads heart to heart and soul to soul, a movement that is absolutely irresistible, like the waters of a flood.

כַּמֵּיִם הַפָּנִים לְפָנִים
כֵּן לִבְהֶאָדָם לְאָדָם:
Just as water reflects the face,
so the heart of one person
reflects the heart of the other.
(Proverbs 27:19)

Audre Lorde, from "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"

...The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves. It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To encourage excellence is to go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of our society. But giving in to the fear of feeling and working to capacity is a luxury only the unintentional can afford, and the unintentional are those who do not wish to guide their own destinies.

This internal requirement toward excellence which we learn from the erotic must not be misconstrued as demanding the impossible from ourselves nor from others. Such a demand incapacitates everyone in the process.

For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness... Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavors, my work becomes a conscious decision a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered... When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force...

Beyond the superficial, the considered phrase, "It feels right to me," acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge, for what that means is the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. And understanding is a handmaiden which can only wait upon, or clarify, that knowledge, deeply born. The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge.

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional,

psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea. That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling. And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called marriage, nor god, nor an afterlife.

This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of.

Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe...

...We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings. But, once recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. The fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression... When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's.

But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society.

Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within. In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial...

...Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world...

POETRY

Teshuvah by Rav Kook

הַתְּשׁוּבָה, הִיא בָּאָה	Teshuvah -- it comes
וְעַל פְּתַחַי עוֹמֶדֶת	and at my opening, stands
דּוֹפְקֶת הִיא אֶת דְּלִתִּי	It knocks at my door.
וְהִנְנִי חָשׁ לַפְתָּח לְפָנֶיהָ	And I was moved to open before it
לְרוֹחָה אֶת שְׁעָרַי לְבָבִי.	To throw wide the gates of my heart
אָנָּה ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא!	Please God, save us!

Poems by Devon Spier,
from *Whatever it is, gently: Quiet Meditations for the Noise of the Pandemic*

(1)

my gratitude practice
isn't

– thankfully but deceptively painting over

my gratitude practice
is

– mercilessly and acceptingly paying attention

(2)

where are all the other hearts?
my Lonely Heart wondered out loud

dear Heart

they are
(quiet aching breaking)
all around you

listen
find them
cradle each other
so you can find life
and the words again

(3)

dear Heart
there are heart songs
your heart
your songs
to be sung

and what if i told you
you have been singing all life long?

the world quiets
at sight of the wound
but
you were born with your HeartMouth open

River birthing G-d through tune!

where they would look away you would have them listen and see see them
listen now and see water to desert You the music World weeping
unwrapped at last and
free!

(4)

i don't know everything
i will never know everything
i cannot fathom what it is
to behold even a grain of Your Wisdom!

Master of the Universe
tremble my fences
so i am shaken out of the
disbelief that i am alone

create of me the unknowing
to sense my fragments and reject my
certainties embracing the
Sources of Living Life in front of me
The Source Not Me
The UnThirsting Source
You!

ON THE AKEIDAH

Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, p. 124 (regarding Gen. 22:15)

[A]re there perhaps before us two distinct religious layers, one from the stratum of ancient idolatry where the sacrifice of human first born was practised, and the other from biblical religion which put an end to this cruel practice and substituted animal sacrifice?

Menachem Mendel of Rimanov (Tr. by Dov Levine)

Since it is known that the Patriarch Abraham fulfilled the entire Torah (Yoma 28b), we should understand whence he obtained his knowledge concerning the precepts of the Torah. How did he know what to do and what not to do, which activities were *mitzvot* (positive commandments) and which activities were *aveirot* (transgressions)?

However, the matter may be explained as follows: Abraham was three years old when he recognized the existence of his Creator (Nedarim 32a). From this juncture onward, he started to serve Hashem with the full concentration of his efforts. Every day he would sanctify and purify himself, concentrating attention on each limb separately, until his entire body attained a great and awesome state of holiness. All of his limbs would be stimulated by themselves with great joy through the elation of the heart and in an excited state of fervent zeal when a mitzvah would come his way. Also, if, God forbid, he was confronted with an activity which came into conflict with our holy Torah, namely some sort of *aveirah*, his limbs would become momentarily sluggish and heavy, and it would be impossible for him to perform this particular activity. This served as a very reliable sign to judge whether or not to engage in each of the activities which came his way. In this manner, our Patriarch Abraham was able to serve Hashem all his days. . . . For by means of this sign, he knew with certainty that the relevant activity was a great mitzvah. . . .

Now, at the time that Holy Blessed One said to him: Take your son, his feet immediately became light. . . . However, afterwards, when he wanted to take the slaughter-knife to slit his son's throat, he felt the onset of a condition of heaviness in his hand. He attempted to stretch out his hand to fetch the slaughter-knife, but his hand would not readily execute his will. Immediately upon observing this phenomenon, our Patriarch Abraham started to strike himself on his head and to pluck out the hairs of his beard, and began to meditate on thoughts of repentance and exclaimed, "Woe to me! Woe to me! Because now it has been proven to me that I have not yet served my Creator even to the slightest degree. For my entire service was based on the sign provided by my limbs. But now this indication has been demonstrated to be unreliable, because I know with certainty that the act of slaughtering my son is in fact a mitzvah, since I heard myself from the mouth of the Holy Blessed One the command, 'Take now your son,' and nevertheless my hand refused to obey this mitzvah of Hashem. Based on this experience, I see with certainty that the sign that I have always depended upon is not reliable and, this being the case, I have not yet begun to serve the Holy Blessed One."

Thereupon, Abraham began to cry profusely. Taking note of the great measure of righteousness that Abraham had demonstrated by virtue of this reaction, Hashem dispatched an angel to him in order to reassure him . . .