which food is your food. And how do we square that metaphor with the notion of a curse? Was this public cursing of the serpent just a show? Had God meant all along for Adam and Eve to move on?

What might the Akeidah reflect if you turned the text once again, at another angle? If you pulled for the truth coming from your own deep well of associations, and pulled that association up like an apple, dripping wet, the same way that metaphor uses the second image to sharpen the first, sometimes the second text can bring Torah to life. For instance, I’ve forged an easy, ongoing relationship between the Akeidah and S. Y. Agnon’s great anthology Days of Awe, whose treasury of legends and commentaries I generally find myself consulting as the holidays draw near.

In one example, Agnon cites a nineteenth-century prayer book as noting that the word “Elul” has the numerical value of the word for understanding, “binah.” To understand it, says Isaiah, comes t’shuva, “an understanding with their heart, return and be healed” (6:10). Is there something here for us to consider when considering the story of the Akeidah? What is the numerical value hidden inside the shell of the Akeidah for you as rabbis? What metaphor do we understand from the Akeidah that brings us t’shuva? What is the posture of the congregants who distance themselves from the Akeidah altogether? Is it possible that the objectionable nature of the story acts as its own sacrificial lamb for the year? Is it our annual pest? Might it be saying, “If you want to reject one story, reject this one, because if you can reject this one, if you can sacrifice the most important story of the year and still be Jewish, then you’re really in like Flynn, or Horowitz.” Is that what we need to understand?

Also, in Days of Awe, Agnon retells the Chasidic homiletic called “Secret Language,” which reads:

The reason for the blowing of the ram’s horn was revealed to me in a dream. It is as though two friends or a father and son, who do not wish that what the one writes to the other should be known to others, were to have a secret language known to no one but themselves. So it is on Rosh HaShanah. It was not the will of the Omnipresent that the accuser should know of our pleas. Therefore, he made up a language for us. That is the ram’s horn, which is only understood by him.

Maybe for some of you this homily is the starting point. Maybe “Secret Language” is a metaphor that allows you to enlarge on the story of Isaac’s binding. For instance, could this story be God’s concession of insecurity in a secret language that we are privileged to share? In a midrash I wrote about the Akeidah in a class taught by Rabbi Ellen Lippmann, I surmised that Abraham always knew he was performing a pantomime for the ages. He knew he was being chosen to play out a dark skit about faith, and he never thought for a moment he was going to kill his son. Maybe the secret language he shared with God allowed him to know that.

Finally, I’ll just mention a tale in Agnon’s anthology about the Baal Shem Tov that ends, “When a man truthfully breaks his heart before God, he can enter into all the gates of the apartments of the king above all kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.” That metaphor of the brokenhearted Jew having broken all of the locks and having access to Juda-

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