

*Being Here, Now*  
Aaron Weinger  
The Conservative Synagogue of the Hamptons  
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*Abraham Had Three Sons*

By Yehudah Amichai, from *Open Closed Open* (1989)

Abraham had three sons, not just two.  
Abraham had three sons: Yishma-El, Yitzhak, and Yivkeh.  
First came Yishma-El, "God will hear,"  
Next came Yitzhak, "he will laugh,"  
And the last was Yivkeh, for he was the youngest,  
The son that Father loved best,  
The son who was offered up on Mount Moriah.  
Yishma-El was saved by his mother, Hagar,  
Yitzhak was saved by the angel,  
But Yivkeh no one saved.  
When he was just a little boy, his father  
Would call him tenderly, Yivkeh,  
Yivkeleh, my sweet little Yivkie  
But he sacrificed him all the same.  
The Torah says the ram, but it was Yivkeh.  
Yishma-El never heard from God again,  
Yitzhak never laughed again,  
Sarah laughed only once, then laughed no more.  
Abraham had three sons: Yishma, "will hear," Yitzhak, "will laugh,"  
Yivkeh, "will cry."  
Yishmah-El, Yitzhak-El, Yivkeh-El.  
God will hear, God will laugh, God will cry.

The capacity to hear, to laugh, and to cry in Amichai's poem is not assigned strictly to the realm of human emotion, but to God as well. When we are able to hear a loved one's experience, join with a friend's pain, experience

laughter, and let the tears fall too—then we enter Godly space. It is my hope that Amichai’s words guide us on this Rosh Hashanah, lead us through the harrowing narrative of the sacrifice of Yivkeh-- that gentle, playful Yivkeh who was slaughtered on Mount Moriah.

I wonder though if not only Yivkeh was lost on that mountain, but that in running to obey the command he heard, Abraham lost himself too. The great Torah commentator Keli Yekar writes that God needed to call out twice, “Abraham, Abraham”—to stop Abraham from going through with the sacrifice of his son. Abraham was so wrapped up in doing the mitzvah, carrying out the command exactly as he heard it, that he missed God’s voice calling him to stop.

In being so obsessed with getting it right on the mountain, the Abraham who pleaded with God to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorah from destruction, the Abraham who argued with God, was lost. The Abraham who questioned, who doubted, who struggled with God—let us call out to that Abraham this morning, just as we call out to Yivkeh. Let us call out to him with the ram’s horn, the shofar. Let us invite him into this space with us, to hear us in our vulnerability, to be with our laughter, to be with our tears

when they fall. Amichai teaches, “God will hear, God will laugh, God will cry.” May that be our work as well: to hear, to laugh, and to cry—to not get lost like Abraham by trying to make everything right, but to be with what is, to partner with God, and to declare Hineni. Here I am.