What should I think while listening to the Shofar?

“When the doors of compassion are opening, on the day that I will lift my hands in prayer to God, please, Almighty, keep in mind on this day of Judgment, the merit of the sacrificer (Abraham), of the sacrificed (Isaac) and the altar (which they built together) ”.

One of the best-known piyutim of the Rosh HaShana Tefilla (liturgy) is “ET SHAARE □□RATZON”, “When the doors of compassion …”. This poem is recited immediately before hearing the Shofar, which officially announces the beginning of the Divine judgment. At that time, we ask God not to judge us according to the strict letter of His law, but with compassion. And we also ask Him to take into account the merit of Abraham, our patriarch, when he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac (Aqedat Ytzjaq). We remember this event at this very moment, first, because the Shofar, a ram’s horn, reminds us of the last “test” to which our patriarch Abraham was subjected.

“It was the final test, the last of the ten: “Take your son, the one born to his wife Sarah, whom you love so much, and offer him as a pure sacrifice to God, on the mountain on which the glory of God manifests ”.

The most difficult test Abraham Abinu had to go through was the binding of Isaac.

The biblical text begins with an exceptional clarification: Genesis 22: *“And God put Abraham to the test and said … sacrifice your beloved son Isaac.”* God was not asking a human sacrifice. The text clarifies that He was “testing” the limits of Abraham’s love and loyalty to Him. It is a “test” –and an exercise that will train the Jewish people for generations. To

understand it better, let's think about the drill that is normally done in a school or a building when the alarm sounds, pretending that there is a fire, and everyone must leave in an orderly manner. This test not only shows if the school, students and teachers are prepared to face this eventuality in real life, but also serves as training for the future: if everyone responds well in this simulation, it means that they are prepared to respond if someday, God forbid, there is a real fire.

With this example in mind, let us now turn to Abraham's test. What our patriarch learns in this test – and teaches for posterity – is that a Jew must be "willing" to sacrifice everything for his or her allegiance to God. And that is how we Jews did it for generations: Hananya, Mishael and Azaria, refuse to betray the Tora, knowing that they will be sentenced to death for refusing to bow down to an idol. The same happened with Chana and her seven sons, or with the "Hasidim Rishonim" in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (2nd century BCE). And with Ribba Aquiba and with millions of Jewish martyrs from the Inquisition to the Shoah. All those who were willing to give up their lives – or that of their children – instead of renouncing their loyalty to God in these extreme circumstances were inspired by the test Abraham Abinu went through when he demonstrated that his love for God was absolutely unconditional.

Today, we don't have to face any of those dire tests. The challenges we must overcome to observe the Tora are ridiculously small compared to the past: I must sacrifice a little of my sleep to pray with Minyan in the morning (especially now in Selichot) or to study Tora at night, or I must sacrifice part of my money to help others, or my business activity to keep Shabbat, etc., etc. Everything is insignificant compared to the challenges our ancestors faced, when fulfilling the Tora might have costed the loss of life …

It is important to keep in mind when listening to the Shofar,

that at this very moment, I’m judging myself. I’m trying to recognize what I am doing wrong and acknowledging what I am not doing right in terms of observing God’s will. And when we judge ourselves we always need a reference, an example with which to compare ourselves. What better reference than Abraham Abinu? If my Father Abraham was willing to sacrifice what he most loved in the world in order to obey God’s will, shouldn’t I be willing to make a few sacrifices to be more careful and vigilant in my allegiance to HaShem?