Chomer Lidrush

Some ideas to turn your gears heading into Parshas Vayeira.

The Voice That Sounds Like Mine

On the road to the Akeidah, the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayera 22) tells us that the Satan did not come at Avraham as an obvious adversary. He appeared as an old man, a *zakein*, and argued that a man of his years does not go and destroy a son given to him at a hundred. When Avraham refused to listen, the Satan went to Yitzchak as a young man, a *bochur*, and told him that the old man had lost his mind and was going to slaughter him. Each one was approached by someone who looked and sounded just like himself.

Rav David Bagno of Ramat Shilo (Ramat Beit Shemesh), in *Connection, Partnership and Redemption*, reads this together with the Gemara in Sukkah (52a), which identifies *hatzefoni* (Yoel 2:20) as the *yetzer hara* hidden in a person's heart. The Satan hides not only inside us but from us, because he presents himself as us, and so we take his doubts to be our own. Yet the true self wants only to do Hashem's will; the *yetzer hara* is an outside force wearing our face, and our task is to recognize the impostor and "roar" at him. As the Zohar (Terumah, II 126a) teaches, the Satan is a messenger sent precisely so that we can learn to stand firm.

A rabbi might take this in two directions. One is a reading of Hashkiveinu that Rav Bagno brings from a shiur of Rav David Salomon: "*v'haseir Satan milfaneinu u'meiachareinu*." Sometimes the voice stands in front of us, blocking us from doing the right thing, and sometimes it stands behind us, pushing us where we never meant to go. The other is a practical test for congregants facing real decisions. When "what do I want?" and "what is easiest?" crowd in, one question cuts through: "what does Hashem want from me right now?" A voice that sounds like you but leads away from that answer may not be you at all. Read Rav Bagno's piece here.