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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

I HAD A REALLY ROUGH DAY!

PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH

Avraham was willing to do anything that Hashem wanted. He was even willing to sacrifice his son to Hashem. As he was about to do so, an angel of Hashem told him to stop. Hashem had only wanted to test Avraham if he would be willing to sacrifice his son. However, Hashem did not want Avraham to actually sacrifice him. Avraham returned home only to find that his wife, Sarah, had passed away. So, Avraham had to find a place to bury her. Avraham had thought that he was the legitimate heir to Eretz Yisrael and would not have to purchase a grave. But he did. He had to get into a dialogue with Efron the Chitti. Efron initially offered Avraham the burial plot for free. The **Torah** says, “No, my lord, hear me: *I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.*” (Bereishis 23:11) The **Midrash** says that Efron never intended to give it to Avraham for free. Efron strongly hinted to an exorbitant price, “My lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver. What is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead.” (23:14-15) Avraham took the hint and when he was ready to pay, Efron demanded a more expensive type of silver currency which was valued at more than the 400 regular *shekalim*. In fact, **Rashi** says that the name Efron is written defectively in the Torah (without the letter l) in this one instance to indicate that there was something missing in Efron. He was not sincere. He promised much but did not do even the very least. He took large silver shekels, superior coins, from Avraham, which were worth more money. The **Talmud** (Bava Metzia 87A) quotes Rabbi Elazar who said that we learn from this that the wicked say much and do not do even a little. The **Midrash** adds that while Avraham was weighing the silver to pay Efron, Efron also stole some of Avraham’s silver from the scale.

Hashem tested our forefather Avraham 10 times. Most commentaries say that the tenth and final test was the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, when Hashem asked Avraham to sacrifice his son, Yitzchok. However, **Rabbeinu Yona** (Avos 5:3) considers the test of the *Akeida* as the 9th test. He says that the 10th and final test was the difficulty that Avraham had to undergo in purchasing a grave for his wife Sarah.

It is true that it was upsetting and aggravating until Avraham was finally able to bury Sarah. However, how could this possibly be considered an even greater test than Avraham’s readiness to sacrifice his own son?

Rav Yissocher Frand answers this question based on a thought by **Rav Eliyahu Dessler** (*Michtav M’Eliyahu*). **Rabbi Dessler** explains that this was the hardest test because of two factors which came together at the same time. Both of those factors would have provoked a certain response from most people. Avraham reaction differently and heroically.

Avraham was faced with a seller who tried to take advantage of him at a time that Avraham could have been under tremendous duress. When Avraham

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passed this test, he demonstrated two of the greatest aspects of his personality.

Rabbi Frand says that Efron was very dishonest. And, Avraham knew that. What is the normal reaction when dealing with such a dishonest person who is trying to cheat you? The

immediate response would be that he is trying to fool me and ‘rip me off’, so I will do the same back to him. He is not acting in a nice way to me, so why should I be nice to him?

Furthermore, how do people react under stress? **Rabbi Frand** was recently in the supermarket. He politely asked the person who was bagging his groceries not to overload his bags to make it easier to carry. The fellow barked at Rabbi Frand! Rabbi Frand asked him, “Why did you talk to me like that?” “I had a hard day!”, he replied.

Sometimes, when someone has a hard day, he feels that he is permitted to treat others in a gruff and in a mean manner.

Another example could be if one experiences losing his luggage after a long airplane flight. At that point a person is very tired and the last thing that he wants to

deal with is having to find his lost luggage. He may feel that he has the right to scream at the ticket agent because he had the stress of having lost his luggage!

Rabbi Frand gives a third example. Someone who has a relative in the hospital is under a lot of pressure. He may be scared and worried. If a nurse or doctor or even someone in the cafeteria would give him a hard time he might react without patience. He might feel that he has the right to act without patience since his relative is in the hospital.

These are all understandable reactions when a person is emotionally charged.

Avraham Avinu just came back from the *Akeida*. Imagine the roller coaster of emotions that he must have felt. He was willing to listen to anything that Hashem asked him. First, he thought that he would be sacrificing his son to Hashem. He went with his full heart, happy to serve Hashem, while at the same time crying for his son. At the last moment, at the height of emotion, Avraham was told not to sacrifice his son. He still felt the need to give a sacrifice to Hashem, so Hashem provided him with a ram. Imagine the drain of emotion that Avraham might have felt. Then imagine that at this emotional state, Avraham returns home to find that his wife had died. And now, coming off the

hardest of days, he must buy a grave for his wife. And he had to deal with the unscrupulous Efron.

Did Avraham react as many people would? Did he allow all his stress to give him a carte blanche to react negatively? No! Avraham acted with *derech erez* and with honor towards Efron. He didn't act disrespectfully, excusing himself by saying that he had a bad day, that he was totally stressed out.

Although dishonest, Efron was a person. That demanded that Avraham treat him like anyone who is in the image of Hashem.

Rabbi Dessler writes, **"Just because I am in pain, does not mean that the other person has to suffer!"**

This incident of burying Sarah, with all the challenges involved, represented the ultimate test in relationships between man and his fellow man. Avraham, who may have been under tremendous personal stress, seemingly had every excuse to act with the dishonest Efron in a harsh manner. Yet he didn't! And that was his greatness! **Rabbeinu Yona** considers that even greater than being willing to sacrifice his son!

We inherited from our forefather Avraham, in our spiritual DNA, the ability to rise above and behave properly to others even under the most challenging of circumstances.

**When one has a hard day at the office,
it does not mean that one can take out one's stresses on one's children or spouse.**

**There is no such 'heter', waiver, permitting
"since I am suffering, I can cause suffering to my fellow man".**

**Even under the most stressful and trying circumstances, when one seems to have every excuse in the world
to act differently, one must be a *mentsch* and treat others with *derech erez*.**

We CAN do it! It is in our DNA!

(based on Rabbi Yissocher Frand at Torah.org)

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