

IN FULL CONTROL

by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

After Avraham's success in the trial of the Akaidas Yitzchak (Binding of Isaac) and demonstration of his complete fealty to G-d, he faced - according to Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1891-1954; of London and B'nai Brak, one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement) - the most difficult test of his life. Sarah died at the time of the Akaida. When Avraham returned euphoric to his life long partner, he discovered that she was no longer alive.

In his intensified state of mourning he had to make the arrangements for her funeral. "And Efron replied to Avraham, saying to him, 'My Lord, heed me! Land worth four hundred silver shekels, between me and you - what is it? Bury your dead.' Avraham heeded Efron and Avraham weighed out to Efron the price he had mentioned in the presence of the Children of Chais, four hundred silver shekels in negotiable currency." (Beraishis/Genesis 21:14-16) At that point of payment, the Torah contracts the spelling of "Efron", eliminating the letter Vav. The Ba'al HaTurim (Torah commentary of Rabbi Ya'akov son of the Rosh; c.1275 - c.1340; based on gematria [hidden understandings based on the numerical value of words, based on the prescribed value of each Hebrew letter] and Masoretic interpretations) explains that the value of "Efron" without the Vav (400) is equivalent to that of "Ra Ayin" (evil eye). While Efron was apparently very polite to Avraham, he overcharged him an exorbitant sum of money for a field and cave that he knew G-d had promised to Avraham. He took advantage of Avraham at a time he was most vulnerable. Avraham knew exactly what Efron was doing to him and that it was another test from G-d to see how he would respond. Avraham paid for the burial plot in full, without any further debate, and treated everyone with the respect and dignity due to people created in G-d's image despite the fact that they were taking advantage of him. But Avraham held true to his principles because he understood that his suffering did not give him license to treat others any less than they should otherwise be treated.

Life presents us all with many challenges. It is simple to treat others as we should when our lives are going smoothly and merrily. Great people do so even when they are not.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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