

STRESS OR TRAUMA? YOU CAN HANDLE IT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Dedicated This Year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov - - In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand - In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand

This week's shiur is sponsored in honor of the special birthday of a - - true eishes chayil, Lisa Pachino, by her loving husband Ronnie and her - - children Erik, Evan, Steven, Conor and Rashi. -

When You Are Faced With Stress or Trauma - Know That You Can Handle It

"And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to cry for her and mourn her." [Bereishis 23:2]

Rashi quotes a very famous Rabbinic tradition that explains the juxtaposition of the Binding of Yitzchak with the death of Sarah, by teaching that Sarah in fact died from the shock of hearing that her son was almost slaughtered.

How did Avraham and Yitzchak, who themselves were physically involved in the actual trauma of the Binding of Yitzchak, manage to survive the trauma? The drama must have been more vivid and frightening for them than for Sarah. Yet, they apparently were none the worse for the experience. Sarah on the other hand, only heard about the events by word of mouth -- after she already heard that Yitzchak was safe -- and yet she died of fright. She could not handle it. Why?

The question is even magnified in light of the fact that we are told by our Sages that Sarah's level of prophecy exceeded that of her husband. Certainly her inability to handle the relatively mild trauma cannot be explained by minimizing the personage of Sarah relative to Avraham.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz suggests that the distinction is based on a Talmudic passage in tractate

Avodah Zarah. The Gemara there says [3a] "Ain HaKadosh Baruch Hu ba b'Trunya im beriyosav" [G-d does not give his creations anything that they cannot handle]. A person has the potential to withstand any stress, trial, or tribulation that he faces in his life. Whether the person does or does not withstand the test is a different story; but by definition it is not beyond the person's capabilities. Implicit in the fact that G-d gives us a difficult task is the fact that He also gives us the ability to deal with that task. Two people may face the same trying circumstances and react differently -- because one of them met the challenge and one -- although he had the potential to meet the challenge -- did not!

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that the test of the Akeida was a trial for Avraham and Yitzchak, but it was never intended to be a test for Sarah. By virtue of the fact that Avraham and Yitzchak had to endure this test, G-d gave them the ability to handle it. Sarah was not given this test and therefore -- despite the fact that she may have been superior in prophecy to her husband -- she was likewise not granted the special Divine Aid (Siyata D'Shmaya) and inner fortitude that were necessary to handle this trauma. Indeed she was not able to handle it.

This teaches us that even though one person is greater than another in certain areas, he may in fact not be able to endure something that a spiritually inferior person is able to endure -- because he was never given the Divine Aid necessary to meet that challenge. The test was not his, so he may not have been granted the requisite spiritual powers that are necessary to pass the test.

Great Jewish Leaders: "Larger Family" Has Priority Over "Immediate Family"

Near the beginning this week's parsha, the pasuk [verse] says, "And Avraham was elderly, advanced in days, and G-d blessed him with everything" [24:1]. Immediately thereafter, Avraham summoned Eliezer, asked him to take an oath, and charged him with finding a wife for Yitzchak. The balance of this rather long chapter (67 pasukim) is the narration of Eliezer's journey to carry out this mission.

We can understand Avraham's concern with the importance of the mission. We can understand why he made Eliezer swear. We can understand the concern for all the slightest details that are covered in the chapter. The only verse that does not really seem to fit into the narration is the first one. Why does this fact that Avraham was elderly and that G-d blessed him with everything serve as the introduction to this whole section?

The Netziv provides two answers to this question. The first answer is that the pasuk was trying to explain why Avraham did not go on the mission himself. After all, if this was such a crucial mission, if the entire future of the Jewish people hung in the balance -- as it did -- why did Avraham entrust it to a servant? The answer is that Avraham was too old to go on the mission himself.

The Netziv's second explanation is a tremendously novel insight. The Netziv explains that the reason Avraham could not go on the mission was because the demands of nation-building that were upon

him were so great, that he simply could not get away. The work he was doing was so pressing that he could not take the time to personally go back to the land of his birthplace.

Avraham was the beacon of spirituality in the world. On a regular basis, he met people who traveled from near and far to speak with him. He was constantly being sought out for his advice, for his prayers, and for his guidance. Avraham could not pick up and leave for weeks or months, despite the importance of the mission.

Eliezer could accomplish the mission of finding a match for Yitzchak; but the task that Avraham was performing could not be delegated to anyone else. The community ('tzibbur') needed him.

This is a startling idea. Even though Yitzchak was Avraham's own son and the issue concerned an urgent family matter on which the future was riding -- nevertheless, Avraham had to give it second priority to his communal responsibilities.

This is really the story of all Gedolei Yisroel [great Jewish leaders]. They are often willing to put their personal and family concerns second to the needs of the community at large. It is a very altruistic type of life.

I mentioned this insight from the Netziv to Rabbi Yoseph Tendler (Headmaster of Ner Israel High School). Rabbi Tendler told me an incident regarding his father-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Perr, of Blessed Memory.

Rabbi Perr had a congregation in South Ozone Park, New York (near JFK airport). South Ozone Park did not have a large community. When Rabbi Tendler made a Bris for one of his sons on a Shabbos, he naturally invited the baby's grandfather. However, Rabbi Perr did not attend. At the time, Rabbi Perr's congregation no longer even had a regular minyan on Shabbos. Only 7, 8, or 9 people attended the services. Nonetheless, Rabbi Perr argued, "If I go away for Shabbos - these 7 or 8 people will not come to shul on Shabbos. At least while they are in shul for those 3 hours, they are not desecrating the Sabbath. If I leave town and they do not come to the synagogue, they will certainly be engaged in activities which violate the Sabbath during those 3 hours." Rabbi Perr felt that his responsibility to not abandon 8 people on a Shabbos morning, so that they would not desecrate Shabbos for those 3 hours, prevented him from attending his own grandson's Bris. And he did not attend.

The community precedes the family. This is a legacy that started with Avraham, and has been the approach of great Jewish leaders ever since.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Chayei Sarah are provided below:

- TTape # 030 - The Shadchan in Halacha
- Tape # 072 - Superstition in Halacha
- Tape # 121 - The Jewish Cemetery
- Tape # 168 - The Laws and Customs of the Hespel
- Tape # 214 - Pilegesh: An Alternative to Marriage?
- Tape # 258 - Intrusion on Another's Shidduch
- Tape # 304 - The "Mazik" of a Child: Is He Responsible?
- Tape # 348 - Determining the Salary of the Shadchan
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