

Grant me burial property with you, so that I may bury my dead from before me. (23:4)

Achuzah (according to *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*) means settlement, the act of becoming domiciled in a given place. When Avraham asked permission to bury his wife, Sarah, he asked that she be able to rest in a place that would be her permanent, everlasting home. Avraham *Avinu* lived his entire life as a wanderer, refusing to settle in any one place, because this would contradict his mission in life: to reach out wherever possible to touch the lives of many, wherever they may be. He was not going to sit back and wait for people to come to him. He had a responsibility. Now, however, the necessity to bury his wife mandated him, for the first time, to purchase a piece of land. His wife's grave would be the first bond to tie him to the land, the place that would draw him to it, and "hold him," as in *achaz*, grasp, hold.

It is ironic that the Patriarch, the father of our nation, did not have an "outreach center," a large domicile to serve as his mainstay, his anchor to give him stability, the place which he could call home, to which he would return each night. Avraham owned nothing – because he needed nothing. He devoted all of himself to Hashem, realizing that, at the end of the day, the only parcel of land which has any sort of permanence is the gravesite. This was his first and only *achuzah*.

Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Imeinu* lived a life of purpose. Blessed with material wealth and prestige – and, finally, an heir - they could have sat back and rested upon their laurels. This, however, would not have earned them Patriarchal and Matriarchal distinction. Life is not about working and retirement. Life is about acting for Hashem. We do not live for ourselves. Hashem commanded Avraham, *Hishalech Lefanai v'eheyai samim*, "Walk before Me and be perfect" (*Bereishis* 17:1). Our Patriarch was not satisfied with the exclusively personal level of perfection that he had achieved (or perhaps his definition of personal achievement was to change the world around him). He invested all of himself into elevating the world around him. His concept, *Ohr lagoyim*, "A light unto the nations" was about personal illumination. Let the world around him observe the spiritual, emotional and moral stature of one who serves Hashem, and let this be their inspiration.

Life for Avraham and Sarah was not a bed of roses. For most of their marriage, they did not have a child, and, when their only son achieved his seminal spiritual experience as the *Olah Temimah*, perfect sacrifice, Sarah died, leaving Avraham alone – to mourn, to exalt in Hashem, to reap and enjoy the *nachas* from his son – alone. He married him off – alone. Yes, life was not perfect, but they never complained. They rose above the pain, which can be brutal, relentless and blinding. How did they do it? *Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl*, explains that they were able to do so specifically because they lived with a mission to elevate the world around them. Their mission remained in full force even in their darkest hour. The sign of true *malchus*, sovereignty, is the sense of responsibility to care for all that is under one's rule. A king is not allowed the luxury of becoming self-absorbed with his personal disappointments and travail. He must constantly work for the betterment of his kingdom. Thus, as soon as Avraham laid Sarah to rest, *Vayakam Avraham*

mei'al p'nei meiso, "And Avraham rose up from his dead" (Ibid 23:8) and continued his mission.

People walk around with their personal problems on their shoulders or written all over their faces. If they would at least carry communal problems on their shoulders it would not be so bad, but they are overwhelmed -- and it takes a toll on them. *Rav Belsky* relates that a man once went to visit *Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl*. When he walked into the *Rosh Yeshivah's* study, it was obvious that he was quite agitated. Apparently, the *bachur, yeshivah* student, who had just left the study was the source of the *Rosh Yeshivah's* agitation. *Rav Hutner* said, *Farvos zenen heintige bachurim azoi* frustrated, *vu is de simchas ha'chaim?* "Why are the *bachurim* these days so frustrated? Where is the *simchas ha'chaim*, the zest for life?" (This occurred about thirty years ago – imagine his reaction today!)

People fall into a funk and either cannot, or will not, pull themselves out of it. They feel it is the responsibility of everyone around them either to suffer with them or to help them. *Rav Belsky* cites an interesting passage in *Meseches Bava Kamma* (31a) from which he derives an insightful lesson: "Two potters are walking, and one trips on an obstruction in the road and falls. The second potter falls on the first." Two potters have fallen, and both have lost their clay pots. It stands to reason that whoever had left the obstruction in the road, causing the first potter to trip and fall, should be held responsible for the damages to both potters. The *Mishnah* apparently does not see it this way. It concludes that the first potter to fall must pay for all of the damages: *She'hayah lo laamod v'lo amad*, "He should have picked himself up right away." Since he did not – he must pay.

The lesson is obvious: Everyone is responsible for his own "mess." If he falls, he must pick himself up and get out of the way, before he becomes a living obstruction. This is true even if he had fallen due to the negligence of others. He has no business laying on the floor, feeling sorry for himself. A person who lacks basic intrinsic happiness is a danger, not only to himself, but to others as well.

Numerous causes might account for one feeling down: he is upset with his parents, his children, or his boss – or lack thereof; his lack of *mazel*, or just the plain unfairness of life (as he sees it). Nonetheless, when he is upset, he creates an environment of depression around him which affects others – first and foremost, those closest to him: his family. While he might convince himself that he is justified, his self-justification certainly does not grant him license to negatively affect others.

Let him learn from Avraham and Sarah whose *simchas ha'chaim* was infectious, causing others to feel positively about themselves. A happy person breeds happiness. A depressed person infects others with his negativity. He accomplishes nothing for himself other than hurting those closest to him.