

D'var Torah for Parshat Chayei Sarah
By Brian Dym

The Mishna in Pirke Avot (Chapter 5, Mishna 4) says,

עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִתְּנָה אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם וְעָמַד בְּכֻלָּם. לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה חִבְתּוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם:

“Our forefather Abraham was tested with ten trials and withstood all of them. This demonstrates how beloved our forefather Abraham of blessed memory was [to G-d].”

There are more than ten possible candidates for this list and the commentaries disagree about which challenges make the list. This week’s parsha, Chayei Sarah contains, according to great 13th century Spanish commentary, Rabbeinu Yonah and others, Avraham’s last test: the buying of *Maarat Hamachpela*, (the Cave of Couples) as the burial place for Sarah and later, for all the *Avot* and *Imahot* (Patriarchs and Matriarchs), except for Rachel.

The buying of Maarat Hamachpela is a test for a few reasons. Avraham was promised this land for the Jewish People, and now he has to buy it. The verses also indicate that many of the local people respected Avraham and knew he was a great person. They spoke about giving it to him as a gift. Avraham insisted on paying for it, but they then chose a fee that was certainly too high. Rather than be annoyed, Avraham just bought the land without complaint. He didn’t act like he had the right to pay less. He didn’t mind being treated like every other customer (or worse) who had to pay full price. He didn’t have the sense of entitlement that many people have today. Instead, Avraham was grateful he had a place to bury his wife. This was the *midah* (trait) of *hakarat hatov*, gratitude.

I have many stomach problems. I grew up throwing up almost every night. Do you know what I did every time after I threw up? I went straight back to bed like nothing happened. Back then I was just annoyed that I woke up every night at about midnight. Now I am grateful that I don’t do that anymore. I might still have ‘thousands’ of stomach problems, but they are not as bad as before. I am also thankful that most of the rest of my life is great.