

# Are We There?

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Would you be willing to sacrifice your own flesh and blood?

Abraham, the Jewish "Pope," the one who taught ethics and monotheism to the entire world, was summoned to the ultimate

challenge.

At age 100, he experienced a fantastic miracle: his 90-year-old wife, Sarah, gave birth to a son, Isaac. God promised Abraham that the Jewish people would descend from this special child. When Isaac turned two, the great leaders of the time gathered in honor of this amazing celebration. Sarah even nursed the local newborn babies, proving that she truly was the mother of this wonder child. The family was the talk of the town.

But then God summoned Abraham for an incredible challenge. He commanded him to offer his son as a sacrifice. Had Abraham been just a regular guy, it would have been difficult enough to slaughter his own child. But Abraham was far from regular: he was respected by even the greatest monarchs as being the leader of the monotheistic world, the one who spoke out against the strange pagan rituals of his time. How could he now stand up in front of the world and slaughter his own child? What would the media say?

Nevertheless, Abraham didn't concern himself with his own thoughts and doubts. Without delay, he hastened to fulfill God's command and bound Isaac to be slaughtered on the altar. As he grasped the knife to sacrifice his dear son, he relents only when an angel interjects.

Abraham could have thought at that point, "I made it! I've reached the top of the mountain; there is nowhere else for me to go. Haven't I experienced enough difficulty in my life? Haven't I proven myself? Surely, I will live out the rest of my days in a calm and tranquil way."

Abraham returned home from his latest and greatest victory only to find out that his righteous wife has passed away. He now needs to bury her, but he doesn't own any real estate. He is forced into negotiations with a money-hungry local named Ephron. After settling on a very large payment, Abraham is

finally able to lay his wife to rest. But now he must find a wife for his son ...

This is the story of each of our lives. We all experience our own individual tests and challenges, and sometimes we feel like we've emerged triumphant. We expect things to be good from now on because we've made it – we are now truly close to God. But soon enough, we confront new problems and trials. We begin to doubt whether we were truly close to God, whether we really accomplished anything.

Reb Noson tells us that this is the ultimate paradox. On the one hand, it is absolutely true that we were blessed with the opportunity to achieve a new closeness with God, and this is an everlasting triumph. But on the other hand, God's greatness is infinite and we are very far away. We must still journey on; we still have much to achieve. But if we understand that this is God's plan – we will eventually arrive.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shiluach HaKen 5*