

# TANSTAAFL

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*Parshat Hayyei Sarah*

This Portion of the Torah contains a most curious conversation. Our father Abraham approaches Efron the Hittite and asks Efron to sell him the field and cave of Machpelah in order that he might bury Sarah. Efron responds that he would give the field and the cave to Abraham. Indeed, he declares that he has already given them. But Abraham persists, insisting that he must purchase the cave for money. Efron then replies, "What is four hundred silver shekels worth of land between you and me? Go; bury your dead." Abraham then gives Efron four hundred shekels and takes possession of the field and cave.

The conversation seems most strange. Why does Efron first insist on making it a gift? Why does Abraham refuse the gift? Why so high a price?

We understand the individuals in the Torah's tales – in addition to their presence as individuals, whether historical or metaphorical – as aspects of the psyche or the *neshamah* of each of us. Where, then, is the Efron of this story within us? Where is the Abraham of this tale?

Efron's name is akin to the Hebrew word *afar*, meaning dust, as in Genesis 2:7, which tells us that G\*d created humanity from the dust of the earth. The dust can be likened to the *Yetzer haRa*, the negative inclination, which exists within

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each individual. Abraham, on the other hand, is a symbol of spirituality and can be understood as representing each individual's *neshamah*, each one's soul.

The *Yetzer haRa*, personified by Efron the Hittite, wants to tell us that enlightenment, understanding, can be obtained as a free gift. But Abraham, the soul, in its deepest and highest spirituality, replies that it doesn't come free. TANSTAAFL; there ain't no such thing as a free lunch.

Then Efron names a price that is far beyond reason. He continues to suggest that it be a gift, mockingly sneering at what he claims is its value. The *Yetzer haRa* wishes us to believe that the cost of understanding is far too great and that we should therefore accept the free gift.

But Abraham willingly pays the exorbitant price mentioned by Efron. The soul knows that, even if the price is far beyond reason, enlightenment and spiritual consciousness are worth any cost; what we receive free is worth only what we pay for it.

The Hassidic master Rebbe Menahem Mendel of Kotzk declared that, if all the angels, all the Prophets, even G\*d G\*dself were to offer him all the wisdom of the Torah as a free gift, he would refuse it, for the very pursuit of the knowledge is worth even more than the knowledge itself.

Or, as Star Trek's ever-logical Mr. Spock once affirmed (in the episode titled "Amok Time"), "You may find that the having is not so pleasing as the wanting. It is not logical, but it is often true."

Shabbat Shalom.

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