

“God’s Gift or Our Own?”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Upon Sarah’s death Abraham buys a burial plot for her in Israel. (Genesis 23) If this land is promised to Abraham, why must he buy a plot?

There is a widespread practice of regifting: you receive something you don’t want, but at the next shower, or baby naming, or wedding, you rewrap and regift. No harm, no foul.

But would you regift to your spouse on a 50th wedding anniversary? To your own child on her Bat Mitzvah? Of course not. At such times, passing on another’s gift is insulting.

Perhaps Abraham bought the land because he wished to. He did not want to give Sarah, at this pivotal and painful moment, something that another had given him even if the other was God. Rather he wished this final gift to come from his own resources.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins once sent a poem to his friend and fellow poet Robert Bridges, who had sworn off reading Hopkins’ strange, inflected verse. In the accompanying letter Hopkins wrote: “You say you would not for any money read my poem again. Nevertheless I beg you will. Besides money, you know, there is love.” As Abraham buried his lifelong partner, he must have reflected that besides God’s gift, there is a husband’s love.