

Selfless Creation

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Selfless creation is the backbone of the world. Like the architect who designs a house he will not inhabit, each of us must shape the world in ways that will not benefit us. We raise children to contribute to life after we are gone. We build businesses or write books or compose music to be enjoyed, we hope, when we are no more. Pitiful is the ambition that does not aim beyond itself.

The Torah teaches this lesson from the moment Abraham and Sarah step upon the stage of the world. God promises that Abraham will be a blessing through his descendents. They will not see the promise fulfilled; they live for posterity.

The Rabbis tell the story, so often repeated, of an old man planting a tree. When asked why — since he will not live to enjoy its fruits — he answers that he plants for those who come after him, as those who came before planted for him. Every person benefits from a world made possible by the wild dreams and diligent work of those who went before. I hope that man's grandchild planted a tree as well.