

Treasuring What We Might Lose

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Why does God command Abraham to sacrifice his son, only to countermand the command at the last moment?

Among the many attempts to explain this difficult story, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggests it teaches an ancient truth: You can only fully appreciate the significance of something or someone when you face their loss. Even with those whom we love it is hard to estimate the hole in our lives when they are gone. Often as a Rabbi I have heard the same plaintive cry at a funeral — if only I had treasured this person when he or she was alive. The same cry echoes in life as we navigate the disappointments and losses that touch each of us in our journey.

Unforgiving time will not double back to permit corrections. Yet as with Abraham there may be reclamation. Some of life's losses can be a prelude to a new understanding and attachment. Perhaps Abraham became the father of a nation because he finally understood the lesson of a father — the irreplaceable preciousness of his child. Having come so close to losing Isaac, Abraham founded a faith that cherishes children. In understanding what it is to lose, we may awaken to love before it is too late.