

If you were going out to buy something, and instead of having to pay for it, you were offered it as a gift, you might say, sweet. You would get what you wanted, and you wouldn't be out its price. But in this week's Torah portion, Abraham is offered Sara's burial plot as a gift, but does not accept, and instead pays more than full price. "Why pay for what was offered for free?" one of the commentators ask, and indeed we might wonder as well: Why would Abraham do that? And what can that mean for us?

Though Abraham had been promised the entire land of Canaan by God, at the time of Sarah's death, he was still a ger ve toshav, a stranger, a temporary resident. By the laws of the time, he could not own land in perpetuity. A gift of land would be a gift of the use of the land during his lifetime.

The purchase of the Cave of Machpelah was the first Jewish landholding in the Promised Land. Its acquisition being witnessed by the men of the community, sitting by the gate of the city, was important in proving that the land was not stolen or gotten by some secret or deceptive dealing. It was the model then followed in the early days of the yishuv, the Jewish return to Israel in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, where great efforts were made to create legal claims and not to depend on ancient promises, or even assurances from world powers.

What about us and what about this evening as we welcome our new members. Sometimes it is tempting to cut corners or chose the easy way out in acquiring things that we want, including our Jewish inheritance. But Chaye Sarah, this week's portion reminds us, that if something is important to us, we want to acquire it in a way that is complete and as robust as possible. Going to summer camp at the JCC teaches you something about Judaism, as does going to the Jewish film festival or even eating in a real Jewish deli, would that we had one nearby. But these do not constitute a full Jewish life.

Taking the time and making the effort to join a congregation, investing yourself and your means in this vehicle for the continuation of Jewish life, you are making a statement about your own commitment to take on your Jewish inheritance. You become part of a community celebrating and mourning, praying and learning, doing good for others and for ourselves. We are so glad that you have made that decision-welcome.