

# When No One is Watching

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

In the Mishna, Hillel teaches, "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man." Here "a man" denotes a caring, ethical person. When others are childish, act like a grownup. The phrase might also mean — when no one else is watching, when there are literally "no men," — you must still do the right thing.

In *The House of Mirth*, Edith Wharton tells us that, "It would have been impossible for Mrs. Peniston to be heroic on a desert island." Some people depend upon the judgment of others to calibrate their own conduct. If alone many of us feel unable to summon the resolution to be good. What do we do, in our media saturated society, when the cameras are off? Do you pocket that unreported income when no one is watching or send mean messages under the cloak of Internet anonymity?

In the Bible we are told that Jacob "is left alone." Then begins his struggle lasting until sunrise. Seeking goodness in society is one step. Beyond that is a secret struggle of the soul, a solitary struggle, when one is alone; the place where there are no men.

In such a place, Jacob struggled and was transformed. What of us?