

“Is the Struggle Worth It?”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

After a fight, the victor is eager for the vanquished to go away and trouble him no more. Why then, after struggling victoriously with the angel, does Jacob refuse to let go, and demand a blessing?

The answer is given by the remarkable Rabbi Kalonymos Shapira, known today as The Esh Kodesh (the Holy Flame), after the name of his book. Rabbi Shapira, the Piaseczner Rebbe, was the rabbi of the Warsaw ghetto, and secretly ran a synagogue during the calamitous war years. He suffered terribly: In the period of a few days in the ghetto, he lost his only son, his mother, his daughter-in-law, and his sister-in-law. There was no one left to say *Kaddish* for them, so he recited *Kaddish* for all.

The Esh Kodesh was deported and murdered in Treblinka in 1943. His buried writings were miraculously discovered after the war by a construction worker laying the foundation for a building on the site of the destroyed ghetto.

Rabbi Shapira explains why Jacob demands a blessing: because Jacob refused to let his struggle be meaningless. The battle had to yield something redemptive. Are the trials of the Jewish people, individually and collectively, all worth it? We are fortunate enough to have a voice reach across from the Kingdom of the Night to elevate our souls. Mindful that the name Israel means “one who struggles with God,” the Esh Kodesh teaching at the darkest moment in our history, shows that Jacob, who gave us the name Israel, knew that struggle contains the seeds of blessing.