

In Memory Of My Father

By Rabbi David Wolpe

I count innumerable insights and lessons among the many gifts that my father, Rabbi Gerald Wolpe zt"l, bequeathed to his children and congregation. Last week he passed away. In his honor and memory, here is one of his teachings:

Although Esau swears to slay his brother Jacob, whom he has not seen for decades, when they meet he falls on Jacob's neck and weeps. What accounts for this change of heart? My father offered an original and beautiful interpretation. In antiquity there were few opportunities for people to see their own reflections; one's own face was unfamiliar. When Esau saw Jacob, he was seeing a likeness of his own face for the first time in many years. Although they were not identical, they were twins; when Esau saw how old Jacob had become, he realized his own age as well, and how many years he had wasted.

The Mishna asks the question: at what time in the morning is it light enough to recite the Shema prayer? The answer is — from the time one can recognize the face of his friend. Seeing the face of another person is to understand oneself and catch a glimpse of the Eternal.

Blessed and fortunate is the child whose parent not only offered such teachings, but also lived a life that illustrated them each day. May the memory of my father be for a blessing.