

Surviving the Rebirth

By Rabbi David Wolpe

In A.S. Byatt's *Angels and Insects* she makes the point that creatures are most vulnerable at the point of metamorphosis, as when the caterpillar is struggling to get out of pupa. Energies devoted to change cannot easily be diverted to protection.

From the newborn child to the easily wounded adolescent, the moment of change is the moment of vulnerability. In the book of Genesis, Jacob wrestles with the angel, becoming "Israel." Why does he fight the night before his meeting with his estranged brother Esau? Perhaps he was changing already, and the angel, sensing the weakness of transformation, chose to strike at this unprotected moment. Jacob fought all night before mustering the strength to fend him off.

At the very moment the modern state of Israel was declared, the surrounding nations attacked. The timing was deliberate, of course; the moment of transformation is the time of weakness. The struggle for survival always costs. Jacob will forever walk with a limp after prevailing over the angel. In battle both sides suffer. There are no monuments to victory anywhere in Israel. There are memorials to the fallen, but no celebrations of triumph. War exacts a terrible price. But the transformation took place nonetheless. The fledgling nation did not emerge unscathed. Still, it was not defeated, and as with Jacob when the dawn broke, it became Israel.