

Stand Up Straight

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

God's first words to the prophet Ezekiel are: "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak to you." (Ezek. 2:1) Reaching our full human height we are most ready to encounter God.

When a Jew has suffered a loss and tears a garment in mourning, the tearing takes place while the mourner stands upright. Confronting the pain and puzzlement of loss, standing upright signifies dignity and hope.

The central Jewish prayer is called the *Amidah*, literally "the standing." Although we bow during the prayer, our posture for most of its duration is upright. Above the ark in many synagogues is carved the injunction "Know before whom you stand."

Judaism does not scorn acceptance and submission. That is the reality of any fragile human being — there is much we cannot change, or have not the wisdom to change. But we face the world standing. Judaism enshrines the satiric wisdom of Monty Python: God appears out of the sky in the *Holy Grail* movie and pleads with the obsequious knights to "Stop groveling!" God, our tradition teaches, wants our full, vibrant, vivid capable selves, standing ready to heal an anguished world. We cannot know our own limitations until we test our own strength. When the child, stretched to full height, proudly proclaims, "Look how tall I've grown!" she is following an ancient tradition. In a broken world, we stand ready to serve.