

Be Dissatisfied

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Israeli President Shimon Peres once offered his view on the greatest Jewish contribution to the world: "Dissatisfaction."

Talk shows and preachers peddle calm and peace of mind. But Peres reminds us of the message of our prophets: Isaiah could not feel satisfied while living amidst anguish and war. Jeremiah could not ignore the widow, the orphan, the corruption around him. Amos cried out for justice. Dissatisfaction is not permission to whine about small things, but to rail against great evils. In a world of so much wickedness, the only noble fate is to be a combatant.

Restlessness built the world. The urge to improve yoked to a wise acknowledgment of limits is the greatest tool of human character. It goes against the powerful impulse to relax, breathe in and let things take care of themselves. When the Torah teaches us to rest on the seventh day it instructs us to work on the other six. Peres is right: complacency is not the Jewish legacy.

Nor is it the inheritance of those who sustained the United States. Our great American sage Emerson lived through a civil war fought to end slavery. He taught:

"People wish to be settled. It is only as far as they are unsettled that there is any hope for them... Rest not."