

Thinking About Death?

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Everything that is born, dies. We acknowledge our mortality, but should we give it much thought? The Spanish philosopher de Unamuno wrote that the syllogism that used to be taught in logic classes — *Socrates is a man; all men are mortal; therefore Socrates is mortal* — sounds very different when rendered: *I am a man; all men are mortal; therefore I will die.*

Spinoza wrote that a wise man thinks of nothing less than death. Very different is the advice of Freud, "we recall the old proverb, if you want to preserve peace, arm for war. Well, if you want to endure life, prepare for death."

Judaism demands attention to this world, yet keeps us aware of our eventual fate. We are continually reminded that we are fleeting, that our lives are like the wind that blows, like the flower that fades. On Yom Kippur we dressed in white, reminiscent of the shrouds in which we will be buried. Judaism asks us to grasp both ends: we know we will die, and therefore should treasure life. Our time is given vividness and urgency by being limited. Love is more precious knowing the sun will set.