

Fastened To Flesh and Bone

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

In life, the everyday mixes with the eternal. Is it holy to sit on a committee or sacred to oversee synagogue budgets? This problem disturbed the great English constitutionalist, Walter Bagehot. In a memorable passage he writes: "There seems to be an unalterable contradiction between the human mind and its employments. How can a soul be a merchant? What relation to an immortal being have the price of linseed, the fall of butter, the tare on tallow, the brokerage on hemp? Can an undying creature debit 'petty expenses' and charge for 'carriage paid?'"

Mitzvot are the Jewish answer to this problem. *Mitzvot* are everyday, sacred actions. Our physical nature is not a contradiction to our spirit; it is the expression of it. Everything can be sacred: eating, economy, trade, talking.

In the Talmud when Hillel is on his way to the bathhouse and asked where he is going, he answers, "to perform a mitzvah." Can a soul shampoo its hair? The answer is that in this world we are not split, we are one. Taking care of ourselves and others — fastened as we are to flesh and bone — is tending an earthly image of the Divine.