

God, Give Me "Stuff"

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The Midrash teaches that when the Israelites left Egypt, God enveloped them in "clouds of glory." When they wished for bread, God provided manna. When they craved meat, God sent quails. Once these wishes had been granted the people began to doubt, saying "Is God among us, or not?"

The point of the Midrash is that Israel could only feel God's presence when they were receiving gifts. This is a common malady; many people pray for something and if they do not receive it assume that there is no God.

Yet, the God of Israel is not a gift store, but a Presence in the lives of those who draw close. While many of the prayers are petitionary, requesting health or peace, Judaism has always understood that our fate is ultimately in our own hands and that God is a strength and a comfort, not an assurance of services rendered. This is the lesson of Job along with everyone who has felt God in bad times: the circumstances may not change but our understanding and reaction does. If you finish your prayers a better person than you began, your prayer has been answered.