

A Timeless, Tough Truth

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Some wisdom is so often repeated that it must be both true and not easily heard.

Here is a message that echoes through all spiritual teaching:

The Baal Shem Tov told us when we find a fault in the world we must first look for that fault inside ourselves. Shakespeare emphasized that the fault is not in the stars but in ourselves. And the English Jacobean Webster put it this way: “Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust/ Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust.”

Still when it comes to finding fault we are fonder of windows than of mirrors. Looking out at a world that seems to be conspiring to thwart our designs and desires, there is always someone, or something, that proves to be responsible for our difficulties. There are obstacles in the world to be sure, but they are often of little consequence next to the obstacles we create for ourselves.

Emerson wrote one night in his journals: “Henry Thoreau made, last night, the fine remark that, as long as a man stands in his own way, everything seems to be in his way.” Yes, you have heard this before. But sometimes the truth is not unknown but ignored.