

Speaking To the Young

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The Torah tells us that Noah was a "*Tzaddik B'dorotav*" righteous in his generation — and our sages note that the word for "generation" is really plural. One interpretation is that righteousness is lasting, affecting those alive in the age of the righteous individual and those who live after.

Another beautiful comment reported by Rabbi Israel Leventhal is that a righteous person must speak not only to his or her own generation, but to the one that follows. One must be able to convey a message to both the aged and the young. No leader can afford to neglect those who grew up in a different time and face different challenges.

To be raised in the day of social media poses new and knotty problems. Changing concepts of privacy and the easy availability of information cannot be ignored because they might be inconvenient to address. Synagogues, schools, leaders, and teachers cannot stop growing simply because they are grown up.

God sees people, the *Midrash* tells us, where they are. As a community we need to grant our youth the same dignity. That requires judgment, patience, and careful listening. Judaism speaks to all generations, but you cannot speak to people before you know where they are.