

Can You Change the Past?

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The challenge, frustration and color of life is that each day is promising at its beginning and irrevocable at its end. Centuries apart, a medieval Persian poet and a modern author voice the same frustration: "The moving finger writes; and, having writ/ moved on: nor all your piety nor wit/ Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,/ nor all your tears wash out a word of it." So wrote Omar Khayyam. Here is the same sentiment, expressed pithily, almost brutally, by the author of the *Forsyte Saga*, John Galsworthy: "The biggest tragedy of life is the utter impossibility to change what you have done."

And yet, Judaism teaches that we cannot undo the past, but we can transcend it. There is *teshuva* and *tikkun*, repentance and repair. A mistake can be an opening instead of an epitaph. What we have fractured we can seek to fix; hurts we inflicted we can try to heal. As individuals and as a people, we can change the past by making it a prelude; no longer is it about the failures alone, but the way failure led us to greater awareness and goodness. The moving finger writes, it is true; but it has not yet written the ending.