

In Praise of Ignorance

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

In the age of knowledge who will say a nice word on behalf of ignorance?

Not deliberate ignorance. Turning away from discovery and insight is cowardice and ultimately destructive. But recognition of the limits of our knowledge is salutary and important. Years ago I heard a writer say that each time you read a biography you should imagine how well your best friend would do recounting your love life. When you realize that even those who know you best have large gaps and misperceptions, you read with a different, more skeptical eye. The story is told of Sir Walter Raleigh that he decided to end his history of the world when he couldn't find the cause of a quarrel under his window at the Tower of London.

It is an old cliché that we believe everything we read in the newspaper so long as we do not have personal knowledge of the events. In an age dominated by constant chatter about others, we know far less than we assume.

Perhaps that is why God is called *chacham harazim* — the One who knows secrets. Only omniscience can understand the whole story. The rest of us grope, seeking to understand. But we can do better if we appreciate that the limits to our knowledge are greater than its reach.