

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

June 5, 2014

Schooled By Suffering

Virgil's Dido declares, "I have known sorrow — and learned to help the sad." In that simple declaration is much of the secret of human wisdom. Our own experience should move through an internal sifting process of learning and growth, and school us into a means for helping others.

Abraham, who is exiled from his land, learns that his descendents will be exiled from theirs. So he transmits a tradition that will enable them to endure centuries of wandering. Moses is forced to make his way to Midian and create a life, so he is well prepared to lead a people who must find their way home. Ruth, who has lost her husband, is a comfort to Naomi, who has lost her sons. Jeremiah, having prophesied disaster, provides hope for the people who must endure it. In later generations Maimonides, fleeing from the land of his youth because

of persecution, will offer gentle counsel to communities of persecuted Jews.

In Jewish communities throughout the world, holocaust survivors are among the leading contributors to Jewish charities. From their unspeakable sorrow and pain they have learned to lift others. Such strength and wisdom reminds us how often suffering is the school of compassion.

[*Shavuot*](#)