

# “Who Knows the Future? Who Knows the Present?”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

When the *British Sun* newspaper dismissed its staff, all of the staff received normal “we regret” letters. The letter to the astrologer began: “As you no doubt foresaw.”

Seeing the future is a coveted human enterprise: fortunetellers, pundits, preachers and prophets crowd human history. Each of us forecasts everything from the weather to international events. Most often our predictions turn out to be laughably wrong. Occasionally, partly by insight but mostly by inadvertence, we get something right. (One day, tape the predictions made on sports shows or Sunday morning talk shows and play them the following week. We are poor prognosticators, even when we have a limited field to investigate and a lot of information. The world is simply too complex to yield easily to our guesses.)

But the prophets of Israel did not really tell the future; rather, they saw into the present. Their stock in trade was less foresight than insight. The prophets knew that if certain behaviors continued, there would be certain results. History was in our hands, and their message was not that we were helpless against the great tides, but that God gave us the freedom to shape what would be.

Since human beings are free, all prophecy must be conditional. Change your ways, insist Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Ezekiel, and you will change your future. The stars, affirms the Talmud, do not control our future; as Shakespeare’s Caesar insists to Brutus: the fault is “not in our stars but in ourselves.”

Who is wise, asks Pirke Avoth? *Haroah Et Hanolad*, which can be translated as one who sees what he brings into being. In other words, watch the future, as it is born of our deeds.