

“Who is a Tabula Rasa?”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Many years ago my father told me that no parent could really believe their children were born as blank slates. From our first moments, we are different. Our personalities are expressions of an innate nature which can be variously developed, but still guided by our natural endowments.

Ensuring that our essential nature will flourish is never easy. As the poet Edward Young asked: "Born originals, how comes it to pass that we die copies?" The sustained pressure of poor role models, the insistent artifice of media manipulations (think of game shows where you win only if you can guess the answer everyone else gives) and the need to 'fit in' often misshape our selves.

Rabbi Zusya famously lamented on his deathbed: "When I get to heaven I know that God will not ask me why I was not as Abraham or Moses. But when God asks — Zusya, why were you not Zusya, what shall I answer?" No one needs reach to the standard of someone else. How sad that so often we do not reach to the highest level of ourselves.

As the Kotzker Rebbe succinctly asked, "If I spend my life pretending to be someone else, who will be me?"