

# “Past and Future Together”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

In his introduction to Arie Eliav’s book on the Bible, Amos Oz writes: “The word ‘before’ in Hebrew (lifnei) means ‘forward’ (in space) but ‘backward’ (in time). This reflects a contradiction between the perception of time and the perception of space that runs through the Hebrew language. It helps us to understand how it is that the Jews, in most generations, stand with ‘their faces to the past.’”

Oz highlights the Hebrew embodiment of Oscar Wilde’s paradox in *De Profundis*: “What lies before me is my past.”

On Tisha B’Av, we are reminded of the historical whiplash that afflicts the Jewish people forever shifting our gaze from past to future. The Talmud teaches that on this day, when we mourn the destruction of the Temple, the Messiah was born. Past and promise meet. As Rabbi Soloveitchik reminds us, as Jews we have both a covenant of history and a covenant of destiny.

Faulkner has his character Gavin Stevens declare: “The past is never dead; it’s not even past.” Scientifically — with the inheritance of genetics — and spiritually — with the inheritance of history — we know this to be true. God, in our tradition, is spoken of as One who was, is, and will be; in God all the ages meet together under the aspect of eternity. That assurance redeems the past and gives hope for the time to come.