

“The Castle is Ablaze”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Is the world more good or bad, more shadow or light? Hopkins beautifully wrote, "Glory be to God for dappled things — For skies of couple-color as a brindled cow." We praise God not for one color alone nor for one state of being. The Talmud goes so far as to teach that one should thank God for bad as one thanks God for good.

There is a powerful Jewish pedigree to this idea that we find transcendence in both sun and shadow. The Bible gives no account of how Abraham came to recognize God. The decisive step in Jewish history is shrouded in silence. The Rabbis rush in with tales to fill in the blanks.

One story tells of a traveler who sees a palace in flames. He cries out, "Is there no one responsible for this palace?" From an upper window the owner peeks through to assure the frightened traveler that he is responsible. The situation is well in hand; the palace has an owner.

Similarly, Abraham, seeing the world in flames, cried out, "Is no one responsible for this world?" God came to Abraham in response to his cry.

The twist to this Midrash is that the word used for "in flames" is *doleket*. *Doleket* can also mean full of light. So perhaps Abraham saw the world as a blazing fire, or as a brilliant light; as a cauldron of injustice, or as a palette of beauty. Did he think so terrible a world must have a Redeemer, or so magnificent a world must have a Creator?

Did Abraham discover God in tragedy or in joy? The midrash suggests that he did both.

As do we.