

# “Against Forgetting”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

As the Torah concludes, Moses exhorts the people to continue telling their story. Ask your elders, (Deut. 32:7) Moses tells the Israelites, they will recount the tales of what Israel has seen.

Why is it that, as Iris Murdoch wrote, “One of the first things a liberated people want to know is the truth about their past?” Persecution is not only of the body; it entails lies, deceptions and shame. The fall of tyrannies always occasions a reckoning for those who want to erase the past. The beginning of liberty, for both individuals and a people, is truth.

Moses now stands before a free people. He recognizes that soon he will no longer be able to teach the Israelites. He does not want the past forgotten or ignored. A centerpiece of Freud’s work was the conviction that it is the forgotten past that masters us; the remembered past can set us free. Despite the shame of slavery, the sins of the desert, the rebellion against Moses and God, Moses does not want the people to forget.

Memory is slippery and self serving. To establish a genuine picture of our lives we cannot remember only the days we shined. Precious too are our mistakes, our failures, our sadnesses and sins. Moshe Rabennu, Moses our teacher, reminds us in his last moments that we must remember everything if we wish to be whole-hearted with each other and with God.