

# “When First We Practice to Deceive”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Dishonesty enables us to change our behavior, but not to change ourselves. True change entails admitting to who we are and who we have been. As they wrestle, the angel asks Jacob his name. It seems a strange question — would an angel struggle all night with a human being and not know who he was?

But Jacob had previously deceived his father, pretending to be Esau. He must first become who he is, Jacob, before he can become someone new. The angel gives Jacob the chance to overcome his deceptions. Admitting he is Jacob, he is ready to be Israel.

In a world of managers, handlers, professional spinners and image-makers, it is increasingly difficult to say, “I am Jacob.” Who we are is easily confused with whom we appear to be. But dishonesty ensures loneliness; if I lie about who I am then no one can know me. They know a false self, a shell, a likable subterfuge, but they do not know me. To know the real self requires sincerity, mandates truth.

The Psalmist writes: “Search me God, and know my heart”. (Ps. 139) The wish to appear perfect is superficial and self-defeating. Better, wish to be good, to be honest, and not to be alone.