

“A Path for Life”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

The world is full of conflicting ideals. How does one see clearly through the tangle of ambitions? In the phrase of the splendid Irish writer Ken Bruen, must we always live with “a conscience full of others’ dreams?”

In “The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism,” Martin Buber retells the story of a man so forgetful that he writes a list of where he puts his clothes at night so that he can locate them in the morning. The next morning, “He took the slip of paper in his hand and read: ‘Cap’ — there it was, and he put it on his head; ‘pants’ — there they lay, he got into them. And so it went until he was fully dressed. ‘That’s all very well, but now where am I myself?’ He looked and looked but could not find himself. ‘And that,’ said the Rabbi, ‘is how it is with us.’”

Buber continues, we must begin with ourselves, but cannot end there. The question after “where am I?” is “what for?” The reply is “not for my own sake.” Our purpose, concludes Buber, is to recognize that there are indeed two worlds, and they are separate, but they need not be. Living for a greater purpose unites the two worlds, enables us to discover who we are, thus “establishing, in our place, a dwelling for the Divine Presence.”