

“Starting out in the Evening”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Where is our generation in the march of history? Are we, as Spengler wrote, “men of early winter,” coming along toward the end of the human story? Is a child born now, in the title of Brian Morton’s wonderful, wistful novel, “Starting Out in the Evening?”

In ancient times the world was new, and in what we call modern times the world is old. That age has effects and, though we may remain ignorant of history, we live with its consequences.

The historian Simon Rawidowicz wrote an essay famously titled: “Israel the Ever Dying People.” He cited Jews in each age who thought they were the last keepers of the flame. The fear that Judaism will die out persists, but so does a greater fear; since we now have the ability to destroy ourselves, not only Jews, but all of humanity is in imminent peril of the end. It is winter, it is evening — and each new generation shivers increasingly with the cold.

When in the Bible God destroyed Sodom, (Gen. 19) Abraham argued that the presence of just ten good people should be enough to avert catastrophe. God conceded, teaching that even a modest amount of goodness can be decisive. A small group could once have saved a city, and may even, in our day, save a world. Since we don’t know how many are required, how about adding to the total by one?