

“Learning to Fly”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

The children’s story of Dumbo is about an elephant with abnormally large ears. Do you remember the moral of the story? Perhaps not: elephants may never forget but we surely do.

Dumbo discovers that his ears, which make him a figure of ridicule, also enable him to fly. In other words, his disability becomes his gift.

The Greeks tell of Philoctetes, a legendary archer whose skill was honed by his isolation, caused by a terrible wound. When he is recalled by the Greeks who need his skill to win the Trojan War, they owe their victory in part to his affliction.

The Rabbis teach that a repentant sinner can reach a spiritual level that one who did not sin can never touch. For the disability, wound or weakness can be the ladder’s rung on which we climb.

Would Moses have risen to such eloquence had he not battled with impeded speech? How much of the magnificence of his late poetry is owed to Milton’s blindness? We are grateful for ease, but not always better for it. Often in life the most powerful mark is made not in the becoming, but in the overcoming.