

# Arguing with God

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Once appearing on an interfaith panel I listened to a Muslim scholar criticizing Judaism's tradition of questioning God. He thought it an unwarranted arrogance for human beings to challenge the Creator of the world.

There is justice in his position. Yet from Abraham on, Judaism has maintained the right of human beings to have a certain *chutzpah k'lappei ma'alah* — hubris toward heaven. Bible scholar Yohanan Muffs taught that a true prophet was one who stood in the breach, defending God to the people but also defending the people to God. Both stood in need of prophetic correction.

Challenges begin in the Bible, but do not end there. The Rabbis mock God's silence. The medieval poets recast the binding of Isaac to insist that God should not ask such sacrifices of Israel. Reb Levi Yizkhak of Bereditchev took God to task for human suffering. Elie Wiesel tells the powerful story of the court in Auschwitz that put God on trial — and found God guilty. The Maggid of Zlotzov taught that the proper translation of Proverbs 3:12 is, "The one who loves the Lord shall argue with Him."

Acceptance is an important religious virtue, but so is integrity. "Why do You hide Your face, ignoring our affliction and distress?" asks the Psalmist. (Ps. 44) Yet the accusation is shaped into a Psalm. We can get angry, anguished, shake our fists at the sky — and still pray.