

Their Stories are Ours as Well

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Repeatedly in our Torah class the question comes up — why does the Torah tell such violent, painful stories? Why portray cruel or thoughtless acts? What is edifying about depravity?

The Bible takes its stand against perfection. There is no perfect person — not Moses, not Abraham, not Rebecca, not Ruth. Each person struggles with the constraints of society and with his or her own passionate nature. A hero is not a flawless person. In the best there is a fractured greatness.

The bible is not a theory about how people should work; it is a description of how they do work. Only when the stories have established for us that the bible truly understands human nature can we allow it to push us along the path to improvement. Who would trust a sacred book that knew nothing of anger, or sin, or sadness? In the cunning of Naomi, the abandon of David and the tortured musings of Ecclesiastes we find parallels for our own lives. Everything has changed — language, dress, social customs, and technology — everything except human nature. We will cry tears over our children as Jacob did and laugh with Sarah. And we will continue reading their stories as long as people try to find their way to one another, and to God.