

# Self-Creation

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

The art of living is one of self creation. The Rabbis of the Talmud teach that when God says in Genesis "Let us make man" God is speaking with the royal 'we.' But a later Hasidic teaching argues that God is speaking to human beings — together we will make you. I will endow you with certain gifts and you must spend your life soul-shaping.

Each morning in our prayers we say "The advantage of a person over a beast is nothing." The traditional interpretation is that death awaits both. But it might also mean that human beings can take advantage of the 'nothing,' the unformed part of themselves that can be shaped. An adolescent wildebeast does not have to grow wiser to be reckoned an adult. But human beings must continually refashion themselves to make something of the nothing.

This teaching is captured in the stirring words of Renaissance philosopher Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: "I did not make you either a heavenly or an earthly creature, either mortal or immortal; I created you so that as your own sculptor you make your own features. You can degenerate into an animal; but you can also be reborn, through the free will of your own spirit, into the image of God."