

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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Paradox, Pompey, and the Female Mosquito

The ancient historian Tacitus recounts that when Jerusalem was conquered and the Roman general Pompey walked into the Holy of Holies in the Temple, he found it empty. Surely this perplexed the future Emperor. Uniquely among ancient civilizations, there was no image or picture of God in the Temple. Pompey probably did not know it, but he was witnessing Judaism's greatest counterintuitive gift to the world.

The wisdom of paradox — that the unseen is real, that less can be more, that silence is eloquent — runs through spiritual life. The arch of Titus depicts the Romans carrying off the goods of the Temple, and surely they must have thought that in their material triumph they were the ultimate victors. But ancient Rome collapsed

and the non-material faith of the Jews endured.
Paradox indeed.

We live with all sorts of paradoxes, some of them deep and others simply delightful. When I was a child I remember listening to the comedian David Brenner say that male mosquitoes buzzed but didn't bite, so if you were lying in bed and heard a buzzing, relax. Everything was fine. But, he said, female mosquitoes make no sound, and they do bite. So the next time in the dark if you hear absolutely nothing...