

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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The Non-Serenity Prayer

Much of Judaism teaches acceptance. Who is happy? ask the Rabbis — one who is satisfied with what he has. Surely part of living a good life is to accept and appreciate.

But if traditions can be divided into those that preach acceptance and those that preach unease, surely Judaism stands firmly in the second camp. We need not go so far as Shimon Peres, who likes to say that the greatest Jewish contribution to the world is dissatisfaction. But it is certainly true that the sense of the unfinished, the itch to improve,

prevails in Judaism and in Jews.

My friend Joseph Epstein likes to say that he knows smart Jews and lucky Jews, but very few serene Jews. In Judaism such serenity as we are granted comes from the joy of making something better, not accepting something that is worse. One of God's names is El Shaddai; one rabbinic interpretation is that God is saying "dai" — enough. I've done as much as I intend to do. Fixing the rest of the world is now your task. Eschew complacency; leave serenity to calm interludes on mountaintops. Down here, where the world is filled with suffering and brokenness, feel upset, angry, inspired — and join the fight.