

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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The Age of Initiative

As Israel prepares to cross the sea, Moses cries out to God who responds, "Why cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward (Ex. 14:15)." Rashi reverses the meaning of the verse, suggesting God is saying "Why cry out? It's on me — tell the Israelites to go forward." Rashi lives in an age (1040-1105) when Jews had little power and reliance on God was the only conceivable strategy. He understood the Passover story as one of total dependence, not human initiative.



Hanukkah, which we celebrate this month, is a story of human struggle and triumph. Unlike the fleeing Israelites, the Maccabees took up arms and succeeded. Understandably, the modern State of Israel took the Maccabees as their model. In older Haggadot one sometimes finds the wicked child depicted as a soldier. The Passover paradigm is total reliance on God. Hanukkah upholds human power alongside Divine encouragement and assurance.

We are blessed to live in a time with a modern state of Israel when Jews can defend themselves. This Hanukkah we still cry out to God, but no longer wait to go forward.