

## “The Angel’s Blessing”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Jacob wrestles with an angel throughout the night and refuses to release the angel until he is blessed. (Gen. 32) Now we expect the angel will bless him. But instead of promising him safety, prosperity, children or even wisdom, the angel changes his name from Jacob to Israel. Is this a blessing?

Though much of who we are is inherited, we are granted the possibility of change. When the Greeks taught that character was fate, they were echoing a biblical lesson: Jacob’s life can only change when Jacob does. The angel has blessed him with the gift of a refashioned self.

The next morning Israel will go forward to meet his brother Esau, who has sworn to kill him. He has shed his fear. He is no longer a child, but a man. Jacob will always be a part of him but now a part of a greater self, the man Israel.

As we approach the holiday of Hanukkah there is darkness. We are tested. In difficult times, few will escape some struggle. But we need not emerge from the night the same way we entered it. We have all been given the blessing of self-creation and of growth. In this season of light, may the dawn discover us anew, ennobled by our efforts to dispel the darkness in our lives and in the lives of those who need us.