

What You Get to Choose

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The Talmud teaches that "everything is in the hands of heaven except reverence for heaven." (Berachot 33b) In other words, there is much we do not choose in this world, but we do choose our posture toward what we are given. For a characteristically wise and elegant formulation of this, listen to the words of the superlative essayist, Joseph Epstein:

"We do not choose to be born. We do not choose our parents. We do not choose our historical epoch, the country of our birth or the immediate circumstances of our upbringing. We do not, most of us, choose to die, nor do we choose the time or conditions of our death. But within all this realm of choicelessness, we do choose how we shall live: courageously or in cowardice, honorably or dishonorably, with purpose or in drift. We decide what is important and what is trivial in life. We decide that what makes us significant is either what we do or what we refuse to do. But no matter how indifferent the universe may be to our choices and decisions, these choices and decision are ours to make. We decide. We choose. And as we decide and choose, so are our lives formed."