

Rabbi David Wolpe's

# *Off The Pulpit*

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## **Self-Transformation**

When Jacob wrestles with the angel until sunrise, the angel tells Jacob to release him as the dawn breaks. Jacob insists on a blessing. The angel asks Jacob his name, and then tells him he is no longer Jacob, but Israel (Gen. 32:25-33).

Usually when we ask for a blessing, we expect something tangible. A blessing consists of health, or possessions, or perhaps an internal state like happiness. But to simply change a name? Who thinks if asked for a blessing a proper response is — "You are no longer Arnold. Now your name is Fred"?

Yet the blessing teaches a deep lesson. The angel does not only change Jacob's name, he explains the meaning — "Israel" is one who has striven with God and human beings, and prevailed. So Jacob's blessing is that of self-transformation. He no longer has to be the Jacob of the past, the trickster, the one estranged from family, fearful of the future. He has struggled, survived, and been changed.

*Teshuva*, repentance, promises that we can become new. Jacob will walk with a limp, scarred by battle. But the man who leaves in the morning is different from the man who began wrestling deep in the night.

Don't Lose Faith in Faith Just Yet

Old Age Doesn't Have to Be a Shipwreck

Rabbi Wolpe's new book *David: The Divided Heart* is available now.