

The Courage Of Curiosity

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

In Annie Dillard's book *For the Time Being* she tells the story of a British district officer named James Taylor in highland New Guinea, now Papua New Guinea. In the 1930's, Taylor made contact with a mountain village, above three thousand feet, whose tribe had never seen a trace of the outside world. One day, on the airstrip hacked from the mountains near his village, one villager cut vines and lashed himself to the fuselage of Taylor's airplane shortly before it took off. He explained calmly to his loved ones that, no matter what happened to him, he had to see where it came from.

That astonishing courage arises from the deep human need to understand, to follow the thread back to the beginning, to discover and explore. Living in the world is not enough; we share a hunger to decipher its mysteries.

The courage of curiosity can lead both to self-sacrifice and to survival. According to writer and chronicler Maurice Samuel, this is the secret of the longevity of the Jewish people. Early on, said Samuel, the Jews simply decided they were not going to disappear until they had this thing figured out. Strapped to the metaphorical fuselage, we are still here, seeking to understand.