

Revel in Repetition:
Excitement and wonder can be found
in life's everyday experiences

In the 15 years I have been living in Israel and the United States, I have made the round trip at least six times each year. Many tell me that no human being - except perhaps airlines personnel - should do so much. But they do not fathom how thrilling it is on every such trip to view from the air the Statue of Liberty here or Israel's shoreline on the Mediterranean. It is as if every such view is my first.

More people owe it to themselves to learn that in many matters of great importance, the repetition of an experience ought not to make them blasé but rather should give them a deepened sense of the mysterious, the glorious, the historic, the eternal.

Perhaps an illustration will help one to understand this.

So many marriages fail because the spouses lose their sense of excitement with simply being with each other as if every day of their union was like the day they first fell in love.

I know that only the rarest couples can recapture that feeling every day - and every moment of each day. Most couples, however, do not know what it is to look at each other and feel how blessed they are. All kinds of problems - financial and familial - obsess them. And in their frustration they blame each other and often seek gratification in places other than home.

Most of us do not lose our sense of wonder when we view a beautiful sunrise or sunset. Why do we fail to see the miracle of human togetherness, the miracle of parenthood, the ecstasy of sexuality? Why is it we become so preoccupied with the problems of existence that we miss the joy of pondering the blessings we have? One says that such is human nature. We take too lightly that to which we become accustomed. But is it impossible to change our perspective at least occasionally?

The late Dr. Leo Jung, one of America's greatest teachers of Judaism, was wont to say that Jewish law mandates for all married couples no sensuous contact with each other for fixed periods every month. They are to be followed by a renewal of the nuptials, virtually a monthly honeymoon. This is the prescription of the Halacha for the sense of excitement about which I write.

With each trip I make to Israel and the States I experience the thrill of renewing my deep ties with each country. As we fly over New York Harbor and I see the Statue of Liberty, I do not visualize the problems of racism and homelessness nor the poverty and depression of multitudes but the vision of the founding fathers, the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights. I am no less committed to the elimination of the evils, but I ponder for an inspired interval the dream, the vision of great men for the New World they thought they were building.

The experience helps me to commit myself the more to the betterment of the society that gave me so much and with which I identify so emotionally.

And when I fly over Israel's coast on the Mediterranean I am not unaware of its problems, which are not due exclusively to its enemies but also to the shortcomings of its citizens. Yet I ponder for an inspired interval the dream and the vision of the founders of Zionism. Before my eyes I see the faces of Chief Rabbis Kook and Herzog and how they visualized the religious revival of Jews in their homeland, and I commit myself to their ideology - even if it appears now like it is a lost cause. The thought of what they were and what they stood for comes to mind as I see the waters of the sea touch upon the shores - the sea becomes the sea of the Talmud and the shores are the shores of the land made holy for Jews unto eternity.

Neither the failures of the United States nor the failures of the State of Israel are forgotten. But for at least precious moments I think of the hopes that I must help fulfill, which like the hopes and dreams of brides and grooms need refreshing from time to time.

This helps to make the round trips easier to take and significant in and of themselves. And I recommend it to all Jews. For a Jew to be a tourist to Israel must be different from being a tourist to any other country - if only one has a Jewish heart. And one should then do it often.

Yet the sense of excitement of which I write applies to many other areas. Students of Torah speak of it in connection with their love, which is the word of God and the insights of His sages and scholars. One would imagine that those who have celebrated Passover Seders for 30, 40 or 50 years would not find it exciting anymore. The text they can already recite from memory. Yet, each year there are new questions and new answers as I sit with my loved ones until after midnight with a sense of excitement. And the daily prayers one recites almost by rote can yield similar moments if only we give it the time we give the Seder.

Jews cherish exciting lives. And living can be exciting if only one chooses the right areas. Jews have ever found it in their family life and Torah study. Perhaps these were the only two areas available to them. But they certainly yielded many opportunities for the joys I have been describing.