

“A Train Ticket”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

When Rabbi Eliezer was buried, the Talmud declared, “A scroll of the Torah was hidden away.” The highest praise one could give to an individual was to compare him to a book.

Books may not be disappearing, but they have seen better days. Everyone is glued to a screen or strapped to a headphone. But books are not merely one form of ‘information delivery system.’ They live with you, recur in your life, allow you to spend days with a character or story, stand on your shelf as a reminder of tales and ideas that touched your life. Two hours in a movie theater may leave you with indelible images. A week with Anna Karenina and you know her soul.

“Find yourself a teacher and get yourself a friend,” teaches the Mishna. Rashi, the great interpreter, asks, “What is meant by a friend? A book.”

The other day I opened a volume of commentaries by Rabbi Mordecai Cohen, published in 1956, and a forty-year-old train ticket fell out. Now I know what my father was reading when he took a train to NY in the mid-Sixties. Seeing that ticket, touching it, was a powerful moment of communion across the decades. I’m so grateful he wasn’t on the train back then with a laptop, watching a movie.