

The Top of the Tell

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Have you ever climbed to the top of a tell? A tell is a pile of old civilizations, massed atop each other. Such hills mark the landscape of Israel, reminding us that civilization is less about building than about rebuilding.

What is true for many civilizations throughout centuries is true for a single civilization through the years. There is always erosion and collapse. Sustaining the blessings we have requires constant rebuilding. Hanukkah, after all, is the holiday not of the dedication of the Temple, but of rededication. Rededication and rebuilding is constant in societies and civilizations.

Rebuilding is also a constant throughout our lives. Life is flux and change. Some things remain the same, but much requires rediscovery and rebuilding. We make new configurations of the qualities we have, much as a new culture takes the material from all that went before. In time, our lives are as tells: the new built on the old with unimagined possibilities unfolding.

There are ruined buildings, said the Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid, but there are no ruined stones. The raw material of societies and personalities endure. We must renew, always renew; what we build may be different than what went before, but from the top of the tell there is a beautiful view.