

What Older People Know

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Childhood, wrote George Eliot, is soothed by no memories of outlived sorrow.

One of the pains of youth is that we have not yet aged; we cannot imagine how much we will change, how our memories will reconfigure themselves, that this moment is not forever. As we grow, the accumulation of sorrows carries comfort: we have been sad, or hurt, or disappointed before and discovered that change is the one constant of life. As Solomon's ring had it, this too shall pass.

Not only do we endure, we reshape the past to make it better. In the enchanting *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez writes: "He was still too young to know that the heart's memory eliminates the bad and magnifies the good, and that thanks to this artifice we manage to endure the burden of the past."

Experience is not transferable. To say to a young person that this pain is fleeting, or you may even remember it with fondness, is a futile exercise; even if understood intellectually it can only be felt with the actual passing of time. So the young will grow, the old will preach and the great truths of life will be appreciated anew.