

“Everything Old is New Again.”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

In his masterful work on *Ibn Daud*, the late Gerson Cohen refers to "the symmetry of history." This same idea is expressed by our tradition in the saying *The ancestors' actions are signposts to the children*. The philosophical notion of eternal recurrence shares some features with this; popular culture simply says "everything old is new again."

Is it true that, as Ecclesiastes tells us, what seems new will be found to have happened in the past? Surely technology changes. The Internet is new; cell phones are new; vaccinations and MRI's are new. But like the tells in Israel — mounds where one civilization is built on the foundation of an older one — all of our innovations are built on an ancient platform.

The need to communicate, the search for health, dreams of accomplishment, the sting of failure, the perplexities of faith — all these are old indeed. The agonies of war, the aspirations for peace, the confusion about the right of other people to live in ways that are anathema to us — all are part of the symmetry of history, the cycle of human understanding and misunderstanding. Abraham left his birthplace and changed his name to become something new; so did David Ben Gurion. Even with a cellphone, a keyboard and a decaf cappuccino, the human struggle remains the same. So we study a tradition first carved in rock, for it contains the recurrent wisdom of the ages.