

“Fads and Forever”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Each Yom Kippur we read about the martyrdom of Rabbi Hananiah Ben Teradyon. As he is wrapped in a scroll by Romans and set on fire, his students ask him, “What do you see?” His answer: “The parchment is burning but the letters are ascending to heaven.”

At that agonizing moment, Rabbi Hananiah had the comfort of knowing that his teachings would endure. He had anticipated by two thousand years the wise words of William James, that, “the great use of life is to spend it on something that outlasts it.”

Carried on an ephemeral tide, we are enchanted by the newest, latest, least lasting. A life saturated with *People* magazine and *American Idol* is not likely to be filled with Torah, with art and worthy music, with literature and social passion and the intricate beauty of the natural world. We have limited time, and we can spend it on things that no one will care about in a year, because they are easy.

Renoir suffered from arthritis toward the end of his life. One day Matisse was in his studio and saw the Master wince with each brushstroke. “Why do you persist?” Matisse asked. “The pain passes,” answered Renoir, “but the beauty lasts forever.”