

“Both Sides Now”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

The Talmud teaches (Bava Kamma, 97b) that Abraham’s coins displayed an old man and woman on one side, and a young man and woman on the other. From this we learn three things:

1. Abraham thought of himself and his wife as one. Similarly, when at the outset of Abraham’s journey God said “Lech L’cha” — you go (in the singular) he went with Sarah.
2. Both youth and age are valuable. Each has its merit and its problems. It is not true, as George Bernard Shaw said, that youth is wasted on the young, any more than wisdom is wasted on the old.
3. Youth and age are continuous with each other. The decisions we take when young will affect our life later on. The decisions we make when older will cast retrospectively the journey we made when young. That is, if your youth led to a flourishing and kind old age, it was in retrospect better spent than if it led to a life of dissipation and emptiness.

Doubtless there is still more to be derived from the beautiful rabbinic teaching. Fortunate are all who live long enough to understand both sides of our forefather’s coin.