

The Joys of Summer

With the Summer comes a stir inside our souls . . . to become free. We shed our Winter and even Spring clothes. In our community, we think only of getting away, of being removed from our “grind,” whatever that may be. I began to wonder, as I noticed that the month of June opens already having seen the holiday of *Shavuot* come out a few days earlier in the month of May, what is it that we do in these “in between” times in our lives? In between the graduations and the holidays, in between the visits and the vacations, what is it that drives us forward?

I cannot answer this question without disclosing that I am presently biased on the subject. The first of a new generation, my nephew Marshall (whom many of you have met), was graduated in May from Columbia University as a newly minted engineer. It is not lost on me that it was nearly 100 years ago (give or take on either side of my family) that my ancestors came to this country, like many others, with barely more than the dust on their clothes. Three generations later, the challenges for the Jewish community are similarly daunting – in 1910, far more Jews were running from Judaism than to it, and today the state of the Jewish community and the rabbinate is such that seminaries are shrinking in ways that could have some very negative long-term impacts for the Jewish people. For the average Jew, however, such as my nephew, life is dominated by the mundane challenges of everyday life.

And so we ask ourselves: What fills us up when we are not living in the highlights of our own “life movie?” How do we not waste the precious moments of our lives on useless or meaningless trivialities? Now, don't get me wrong: I love playing video games and numerous sports, as well as many other “not-so-important” past-times, but I am speaking of something greater than that. I am asking that age-old question: What makes our lives worth living, or perhaps better stated, “worthy of living?” This is the question that my nephew will be encountering soon enough (if he hasn't already since his becoming graduated and no longer counted as a “student,” but now simply a “man”), just as it enters our thoughts from time to time.

I wonder, as we enter the Summer with all its focus on self, on enjoyment, on wild abandon, how can we both enjoy letting go and fill our precious moments with the most value? It is my blessing, my wish, for you that the coming month will bring you some answers to this question. I know of one, however, that is sure to make my life more meaningful: Come by the shul some Friday evening in June and say “hello;” it's Summer after all, and a time for getting out and sharing the positive attitude that Sun and surf bring. I look forward to seeing you *with* your “Summer smile!”

May we find meaning and joy in every moment that we have been blessed to receive in this world. (Oh, and let's pray that there are a few gorgeous days thrown into the mix . . . that wouldn't hurt, either!)

Rabbi Gerald R. Fox