

Old and New

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

I read the newspaper each day, an old practice that brings home everything new. There is always a new celebrity, a new invention, a burgeoning business. We can stuff ourselves with the new. Old books and movies are forgotten unless they are remade.

Judaism has a different attitude toward what is old. Our tradition always understood that the first step to obliterating culture is to foreshorten memory. Here is a poignant passage from a not so very old novel, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*:

'But why is it prohibited?' asked the Savage. In the excitement of meeting a man who had read Shakespeare he had momentarily forgotten everything else.

The controller shrugged his shoulders. 'Because it's old; that's the chief reason. We haven't any use for old things here.'

'Even when they're beautiful?'

'Particularly when they're beautiful. Beauty's attractive, and we don't want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones.'

The Rabbis tell us Abraham was the first person who earned the merit of looking old. We might think of that as a debility; the Rabbis reckoned it beautiful. This new year, resolve to read an old book, one tested by time. The Torah, perhaps?

