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A REFRESHING EXPERIENCE

1 And so another new year begins. Summer's leisureliness comes to an
2 end, vacations are over, and the children return to home and school. We
3 prepare for another "season" of regular activities -- not only at work and
4 home, but in synagogue and community as well.

5 Yet here and there I detect, from a snatch of conversation or from a
6 gesture, that the prospect is not always too appealing. Sometimes the
7 feeling is quite open: "I'm tired, Rabbi. I've done more than my share.
8 Let some of the younger people take over. I'm spent!"

9 Partly right. Younger people should come in to the community and
10 assume their fair share of the burdens of leadership, financial support, and
11 contributions of time and effort. This is as true of synagogue activity
12 as well as ^{OF} business and profession.. This is the normal progression which
13 assures a future for ourselves and our children.

14 But the sentiment is also partly wrong. "New blood" is welcome, and
15 vital too; but it does not mean that the "old blood" has to stagnate and
16 that "old faces" have to be banished. The community grows by addition,
17 not substitution. The weariness that some of us complain about is more
18 illusory than real. Vacation and rest are necessary to refresh ourselves, but
19 more important is the attitude we bring to our work.

20 Moses was weary to the marrow of his bones with the ever-complaining
21 Israelites who had so little appreciation of what he was striving for. He
22 was fed up, disgusted, tired beyond words. He turned to God: "I am not able
23 to bear this people all by myself. They are too much for me" (Nu. 11:14).
24

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page 2 - A REFRESHING EXPERIENCE

I'd rather die, he said, than continue this way. God's answer was for Moses to choose a council of seventy elders to assist him -- the nucleus of the Sanhedrin of the future. "And I will take of your spirit and place it on them" (ib., v.17). Here the commentators ask: did not God have enough "spirit" of His own? Why did He have to take of Moses' spirit for them?

The answer is exceedingly important to all of us "wayward weary": Of course God has infinite resources of spirit. But what He wanted to teach Moses was that despite his fatigue and resentment and feeling of depletion, he still had enough "spirit" within him to supply seventy people! Far from being spent and drained, tired unto death, Moses had the spiritual and psychological vigor to share with a whole community.

As we return to another cycle of effort and activity, let us keep that point in mind. Our weariness is more often imagined than real. Ellul and Tishri are the season for us to look deep within ourselves and -- cynics to the contrary notwithstanding -- be amazed at the "spirit" that we still retain. A truly "refreshing experience!"

Let us return with the vitality that is born of commitment, ready to make our contributions and, in turn, to receive the benefits that come from true community and the blessings that come from our heavenly Father, for a year of peace, health -- and ever more strength!

NORMAN LAMM