

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei March 14, 2015

“Putting First Things First”

A Delta airplane slid off a runway late last Thursday morning at New York's LaGuardia Airport, its nose busting through a fence before skidding to a halt mere feet from the frigid East River. Delta Flight 1086 briefly circled New York City due to issues with snow and ice before touching down shortly after 11 a.m. Almost as soon as it did, those aboard realized something was wrong -- the aircraft's wheels seemed to have little to no traction, sliding for about 20 seconds. "You didn't feel the wheels catch," passenger Jared Faellaci said. Then it was a matter of "where we are going to end up," he said. A little further, and the plane -- with 127 passengers and five crew members -- would have been in the icy waters rather than on the airport's snow-covered ground. Current NFL tight end Larry Donnell, another passenger on the plane, said, "I'm blessed to be safe and sound after our plane skidded off the runway at LaGuardia airport today."

Video showed passengers exiting the plane into the sub-freezing temperatures, as emergency vehicles converged on the area. <http://7online.com/news/laguardia-flight-1086-passenger-jared-faellaci-talks-about-plane-accident/545970/> Twenty-four people suffered non-life-threatening injuries. Three of those were transported to nearby hospitals. One news report said that passengers were "thankful for the plane's crew, first responders and G-d that it wasn't much worse." When rejoicing over good news, should G-d be mentioned first or last?

In approximately 700 B.C. King Hezekiah of Judah came down with a terminal illness, but miraculously recovered. In response, the Babylonian king sent him a letter expressing how happy the Babylonians were that he had his health restored. The king opened his letter: "Peace unto the great king Hezekiah. Peace unto the great city of Jerusalem. Peace unto to the great G-d of Israel." He put G-d third. Nebuchadnezzar was a young scribe in the king's court at the time and was not present when the letter was written. However, when told how it was worded he said, "How can you do that? How can you mention G-d last? G-d should be mentioned first." Nebuchadnezzar then took four steps to bring back the messenger. Commentators to the Talmud say that for every step that he took he was given a generation to continue after him as ruler of the empire. When giving thanks, first give thanks to G-d.

Parshas Vayakhel--Pekudei Exodus 35:1 -- 40:38

This week we read the final portion of Exodus, a book which began with the Jewish people enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt and now ends with the completion of the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) in the desert. Exodus is known as 'the Book of Redemption'; redemption was achieved not only through our escape from slavery, but also through receiving the Torah on Mt. Sinai which gave purpose to that freedom. The climax of that salvation was when G-d rested His presence amongst the Jewish nation when the Mishkan was completed.

Parshas Vayakhel (Exodus 35:1 -- 38:20) begins with Moses assembling the entire nation of Israel to transmit the details of the construction and fabrication of the Mishkan as described in the three previous Torah portions. However, Moses first cautions them about the fundamental mitzvah to observe Shabbat. The nation is reminded that although the construction of the Mishkan is of transcendent importance, it does not take precedence over the weekly observance of Shabbat. The portion describes that the Jewish people came forward with their generous contributions for the Mishkan's construction, producing a surplus of supplies. The craftsmen are selected and the building begins.

Parshas Pekudei (Exodus 38:21 -- 40:38) begins with a complete accounting of the gold, silver and copper contributed by the people for use in the Mishkan. Following Moses' inspection and approval of the many utensils and unassembled parts, Moses sets up the Mishkan on Rosh Chodesh Nissan as each part is anointed and arranged in its proper location. And as G-d promised, His glory fills the Mishkan.

Rabbinic Ruminations

In an unhappy marriage, one partner often fails to speak up about problems affecting them both. Why? Contrary to what is often assumed, researchers at the University of Waterloo found that sufferers of low self-esteem tend not to voice relationship complaints with their partner because they fear rejection. "There is a perception that people with low self-esteem tend to be more negative and complain a lot more," said Megan McCarthy, the study's author and a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Psychology. "While that may be the case in some social situations, our study suggests that in romantic relationships, the partner with low self-esteem resists addressing problems."

The study is important for understanding how intimate partner communication can help improve the love lives of people around the world. "If your significant other is not engaging in open and honest conversation about the relationship," said Ms. McCarthy, "it may not be that they don't care, but rather that they feel insecure and are afraid of being hurt. We've found that people with a more negative self-concept often have doubts and anxieties about the extent to which other people care about them." The research was recently presented at The Society for Personality and Social Psychology's 16th Annual Meeting in California. Ms. McCarthy concluded: "We all know that close relationships can sometimes be difficult. The key issue, then, is how we choose to deal with it when we feel dissatisfied with a partner." George Bernard Shaw said, "*The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.*" Sharing your dissatisfaction about significant issues is vital to maintaining the health and vibrancy of close relationships. When criticism is offered in a harsh manner that leads others to become defensive or angry, words are better left unsaid. However, the Torah (Leviticus 19:16-18) juxtaposes the instruction to give criticism next to the command to "Love your friend as yourself." The best criticism comes from a sense of love and obligation to help.

Quote of the Week

Success is never final and failure never fatal. It's courage that counts. -- *George F. Tilton* – American Geochemist (1923-2010)¹

Joke of the Week

A single guy decided life would be more fun if he had a pet. So he went to the pet store and told the owner that he wanted to buy an unusual pet. After some discussion, he finally bought a talking centipede, (100-legged bug), which came in a little white box to use for his house. He took the box back home, found a good spot for the box, and decided he would start off by taking his new pet to shul with him. So he asked the centipede in the box, "Would you like to go to shul with me today?"

But there was no answer from his new pet. This bothered him a bit, but he waited a few minutes and then asked again, "How about going to shul with me?"

But again, there was no answer from his new friend and pet. So he waited a few minutes more, thinking about the situation. The guy decided to invite the centipede one last time. This time he put his face up against the centipede's house and shouted, "Hey, in there! Would you like to go to shul with me?"

This time, a little voice came out of the box, "I heard you the first time! I'm putting my shoes on!"