

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason

Parshas Toldos November 2, 2013

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Snap and crackle may be losing its pop. Five years ago Greek yogurt was a novelty in the U.S., but yogurt, especially the Greek style, is now the second-biggest seller in the breakfast food market. Americans seem to be losing their taste for traditional cereals. And that means traditional cold cereals, which have seen a seven percent drop in sales volume in the past four years, are going to have to step up to the plate (or bowl). American breakfast cereal companies may have a new motto: Beware of Greeks bearing breakfast yogurt.

Why the decline in traditional American breakfast fare? Wall Street mavens cite several reasons: consumer boredom with cereal, a desire for higher protein products such as yogurt, and the need for on-the-go breakfasts consumers can eat in their cars. "Not all consumers choose a bowl of cereal and milk," Kellogg said in a statement. "...we're developing foods that provide the benefits of cereal in portable and convenient formats." Those new "formats" include breakfast bars and shakes. Fast food chains are 'fast' getting into the act, given that many Americans no longer make the time to sit down at the kitchen table in the morning. Taco Bell is rolling out a national breakfast menu, and McDonald's has started serving "Breakfast After Midnight" at some of its 24-hour stores. Industry sources report the first meal of the day is a \$42 billion business, and the number of quick-serve breakfast items jumped 17 percent between 2009 and 2011.

While a quick and cheerful readiness to act can be positive, history and experience also confirms the truth of Benjamin Franklin's famous saying: *Great haste makes great waste*. Reuben lost his firstborn privileges because he was too hasty in an incident concerning his father Jacob's tent. Jacob said to Reuben, "Water-like impetuosity -- you cannot be foremost.." (Gen. 49:4). The proper approach? Move with deliberate speed -- and be sure to eat a good breakfast.

Parshas Toldos Genesis 25:19 -- 28:9

Isaac and Rebecca pray to G-d for a child. Rebecca finally conceives, and after a difficult pregnancy she gives birth to twins -- Esau and Jacob. Their personality differences soon grow apparent, as Esau turns to hunting while Jacob is pure and wholesome, spending his time studying Torah. Returning from a hunting expedition, Esau finds Jacob cooking a pot of lentil soup. Jacob agrees to give his older brother a portion from the pot of soup in exchange for the spiritual birthright.

Faced with a severe famine, Isaac and family settle in Gerar (the land of the Philistines within Israel's borders) rather than descend to Egypt as his father Abraham had done years before. After experiencing astonishing financial success, Isaac comes into continual conflict with King Avimelech over the wells which Isaac dug anew. This pattern of 'success and persecution' has repeated itself throughout Jewish history. Isaac decides to bless Esau as the firstborn. At Rebecca's insistence, Jacob disguises himself as his older brother and receives the blessing of the firstborn (which rightfully belonged to him). The Torah portion concludes with Jacob fleeing from Esau's wrath for 'stealing' his blessing and escaping to Charan to stay with his uncle, Laban, where he is to find a wife.

Rabbinic Ruminations

"There's no place like home."

This memorable quote from *The Wizard of Oz* sums up how many of us feel about home—it's comfortable and familiar. But beyond the physical place, people consider other things "home" too, sometimes unconsciously: beliefs, previous choices, set routines. These things form an individual's *status quo*, which people tend to prefer to stick to. As a result, people often "choose" pre-set options even when many others are available. Known as *status quo bias*, or *system justification bias*, this mindset has some interesting -- and even paradoxical -- effects.

One of the many studies on these effects gave people a hypothetical inheritance from a great-uncle and asked them whether they would like to invest in a moderate-risk company, a high-risk company, treasury bills or municipal bonds. For different groups researchers told people that a significant portion of the inheritance was already invested in one of the options, effectively setting a default. Setting any random option as the default significantly increased its popularity well beyond the personal preferences of the individuals. Other surveys find that low-income groups are hardly more likely than high-income groups to want tax changes that mean they will get more money. People's politics often don't line up with their position in society.

Our father Abraham was impervious to the effects of *status quo bias*. He endured all types of mockery and persecution for holding beliefs that were, to say the least, politically incorrect. In fact, the Torah calls him "Avraham Ha-Ivri" – Abraham the Hebrew. HA-IVRI translates literally as "the one who stands on the other side." The entire world stood on one side, with Abraham standing firm on the other. And though Dorothy was right -- "*There's no place like home*" -- we, the children of Abraham the Hebrew, have the capacity to resist any pressure and stand alone if need be for the sake of G-d.

Quote of the Week

Great minds discuss ideas. Average minds discuss events. Small minds discuss people. -- *Eleanor Roosevelt*

Joke of the Week

We know that a big problem in organized Jewish life today is our own lack of commitment. The rabbi was standing at the door welcoming people after the Rosh Hashana service. He shook the hand of one man and said, "Let me introduce myself. I'm the rabbi of this shul. We're pleased to have you visiting with us today."

The stranger said, "Now wait a minute, rabbi, I'm a member of this shul, not a visitor."

The perplexed rabbi said, "But I've never seen you in the 5 years I've been here."

The stranger answered, "Well, I never said I was a fanatic!"