

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Don Jacobson never knew what the family feud was all about. What he did know is that large parts of his extended family had never spoken to each other because of a decades-old rift. "I understand that for some reason, someone got mad at someone and no one spoke for years, if not decades. I know you're shocked to hear that Jews ever do that," Jacobson, a Denver resident, said in explaining the family's drifting apart. "Clearly, whatever falling-outs there were, were sufficiently severe that whatever contact in the family I would have hoped for — gatherings for Jewish holidays and weekends — did not happen."

Don Jacobson knew that he had many unknown relatives, because his paternal grandfather, Harry, had 12 or 13 siblings. And that translated into numerous family events missed and conversations never had. Don knew that one of Harry's brothers had a son, Sol -- and that Sol, his wife Esther, their four daughters and two sons had lived in Brooklyn. At least they had lived there long ago. So what did Don do? He picked up the phone and called.

As it turned out, Sol and Esther Jacobson still reside in Brooklyn, and that night the Jacobsons of Denver and Brooklyn spoke by phone. "It was a delightful conversation. It was great fun," Jacobson -- who ironically works to resolve conflicts as a mediator and a lawyer -- said after talking with his father's first cousin. Don and Sol conversed for 30 minutes — the first of what they agreed would be a renewed link between their branches of the family. Their conversation included the jests that come with familiarity — "You're a rabbi? What kind of profession is that for a nice Jewish boy?" Don asked Sol. He would ask many more questions and do a lot of listening.

Sometimes, a decades-old rift can end that simply: With a phone call.

Parshas Acharei /Kedoshim Leviticus 16:1 - 20:27

Acharei begins with a lengthy description of the special Yom Kippur service to be performed in the *Mishkan* by the Kohen Gadol. The service included the lottery selection from among two identical goats, one of which would become a national sin offering and the other would be pushed off a cliff in the desert as the bearer of the people's sins (the 'scapegoat'). We also find described the command that Yom Kippur and its laws of fasting and refraining from work be observed eternally by the Jewish people as a day of atonement. *Acharei* concludes with a listing of the immoral and forbidden sexual relationships, and the command that the Jewish people maintain and ensure the holiness of the land of Israel.

Kedoshim begins with G-d's command to the entire nation of Israel to be holy, emulating the supreme sanctity of G-d Himself. The Torah goes on to delineate a multitude of *mitzvos* through which we can achieve sanctity, covering a wide variety of subjects, both positive commandments and negative injunctions, dealing with our unique relationships to G-d and our fellow man. Amongst the highlights; revere your parents, guard Shabbos from desecration, have honest dealings with our neighbors, refrain from tale-bearing, don't hate your brother in your heart, and the well-known commandment to love your friend as yourself. *Kedoshim* concludes with the commandment that we be a holy and distinct people from among the nations of the world.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Strong willpower greatly increases your ability to reach your goals. But what can you do when challenged by temptation? The likelihood of a successful outcome can be increased by the way you think about your vices.

In four related studies published in the August 2012 *Journal of Consumer Research*, researchers examined the effect of different wording when using self-talk to resist temptation. When participants framed a refusal as "I don't" (for instance, "I don't eat sugar") instead of "I can't," they were more successful at resisting the desire to eat unhealthy foods or skip the gym. Study author Vanessa Patrick, professor of marketing at the University of Houston C. T. Bauer College of Business, says, "I believe that an effective route to self-regulation is by managing one's desire for the temptation, instead of relying solely on willpower." She also believes that deprivation is an ineffective route to self-control. "Saying 'I can't' connotes deprivation, while saying 'I don't' makes us feel empowered and better able to resist temptation.

You might have a number of things about which you say, "I can't" when you really can. Casting willpower as a choice is an expression of our humanity; The Torah teaches that the capacity to recognize and choose between good and evil is a feature unique to humans. The classic understanding of man as created "In the image of G-d" means that he alone can identify right and wrong and make moral choices and say 'no' to temptation. Only the descendants of Adam and Eve -- created in the image of G-d -- can recognize good and evil and become like G-d through the proper exercise of the gift of free will. Be it in matters of self-discipline or morality, "I don't" beats "I can't" -- and is a positive first step to ultimately being able to say, "I can, and I will."

Quote of the Week

Here is a simple but powerful rule - always give people more than they expect to get. -- *Nelson Boswell*

Joke of the Week

A man came to ask his Rabbi if he had to return to where he had eaten in order to *bentch* (say the after-meal blessings).

"Why didn't you *bentch* when you were there?" asked the Rabbi.

"Because I didn't say *hamotzi* (a blessing) on the bread I had with the meal."

"Why didn't you say *hamotzi*?"

"Because I didn't wash my hands."

"Why didn't you wash?"

"They didn't have a designated hand-washing station."

"Why didn't they have a place to wash your hands?"

"It was a *treife* (non-kosher) restaurant."

"Why were you eating in a *treife* restaurant?"

"Because all the kosher ones were closed."

"Why were the kosher restaurants all closed?"

"Because it was Yom Kippur."