

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Kedoshim April 23, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

The most religious state is . . . Once again, Mississippi reigns as the most religious U.S. state, with 61 percent of its residents classified as "very religious," according to the results of a Gallup survey released in February. In contrast, only 22 percent of people in Vermont ranked as devout, and the Green Mountain state held onto its title as "least religious." Overall, about 41 percent of Americans indicated that they are "very religious," meaning that religion is an important part of their daily lives and that they attend religious services every week or almost every week.

The most religious states still tend to be clustered in the South, though Utah — with its large population of Mormons, typically the most religious of any denomination — stands out as an exception and ranks No. 2 in religiosity. Protestants, have "above-average religiousness," according to Gallup. Where do American Jews stand, religiously? According to the 2013 Pew report, 62% say that being Jewish is mainly a matter of ancestry and culture, while just 15% say it is mainly a matter of religion. The Pew report notes that by several conventional measures, Jews tend to be less religious than the U.S. public as a whole. While 56 percent of the general public say that religion is very important in their lives, the same is true for only 26 percent of American Jews.

What does it mean to be a "Religious Jew"? Many answers, understandings and opinions abound. Perhaps a better question to ask is what it means to be a "Good Jew" -- whether or not we are living up to the commitment made by the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai. What was that commitment? *Na'aseh v'nishma, We will do, and we will hear.*

Parshas Kedoshim Leviticus 19:1 - 20:27

The portion 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. We are commanded to revere our parents, to guard Shabbat from being desecrated, and to refrain from the worship of idols. G-d instructs us to leave various gifts from our harvest for the poor and downtrodden, including the edge of the field and the sheaves which were unintentionally dropped while being gathered. We must maintain justice, have honest dealings with our neighbors, refrain from gossip, not stand by while another's life is in danger, and not hate another in our heart. One of the most famous mitzvos in the Torah appears in this week's portion: "You shall love your friend as yourself." We are commanded to admonish our neighbor if he does wrong, and forbidden to take revenge or bear a grudge. The portion continues with a listing of the punishments to be meted out against people who transgress and participate in various forbidden relationships. Parshas Kedoshim concludes with the commandment, once again, that we be a holy and distinct people from among the nations of the world.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Researchers from Columbia's Business School asked students to appraise the resume of an entrepreneur called Howard Roizen. His resume showed that Howard had worked at Apple, launched his own software company and been a partner at a venture capital firm. He was a proficient networker and had very powerful friends including Bill Gates. Colleagues described him as a "catalyst" and a "captain of industry". The students thought he'd be an excellent person to have within a company because he was someone who got things done and was likeable. The interesting part of this experiment was that "Howard" Roizen didn't exist. The true owner of the resume was a woman, Heidi Roizen. When students were asked to review the resume of "Heidi" Roizen they judged her to be more selfish and less desirable to work with than Howard, even though she was viewed as being equally as effective. Another study, from 1999, asked psychologists to evaluate CVs that were identical save for the name. Male candidates were deemed more qualified, while females were four times as likely to receive comments such as "Would need to see evidence that she had gotten these grants and publications on her own." A study last year identified a similar dynamic among research scientists. In both cases, men

and women were equally biased. A 2000 study found that female musicians advanced 50 percent more often in orchestra auditions when their gender was masked. And gender bias sets in early. A study from 1998 found that when college students read anonymous essays written by sixth-graders in stereotypically male or female handwriting, they gave the “boys” higher grades.

“Belief barriers” affect us in many ways. Biases and conflicts of interest affect our ability to judge objectively. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler wrote that intellectual bias is a given in all rational deliberations, and that it goes without saying that bias plays a significant role in all emotional deliberations. *“And you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe will blind the eyes of the wise and make just words crooked” (Deut. 16:19).* Don't accept bribes in your decision-making -- even a bribe of bias.

Quote of the Week

I have no problem with those parts of the Bible I don't understand. It's those parts of the Bible I do understand that give me fits. -- *Mark Twain*

Joke of the Week

A young boy enters a barber shop and the barber whispers to his customer, “This is the dumbest kid in the world. Watch while I prove it to you.”

The barber puts a dollar bill in one hand and two quarters in the other, then calls the boy over and asks, “Which do you want, son?”

The boy takes the quarters and leaves.

“What did I tell you?” said the barber. “That kid never learns!”

Later, when the customer leaves, he sees the same young boy coming out of the ice cream store.

“Hey son! May I ask you a question? Why did you take the quarters instead of the dollar bill?”

The boy licked his cone and replied, “Because the day I take the dollar the game's over!”