

## *Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*

### *Parshas Passover April 4, 2015*

#### *"What Happens to All Those Notes in the Western Wall?"*

Millions of people a year visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Inspired by one of Judaism's holiest sites, many visitors offer a prayer while standing in the shadow of where the *Beit HaMikdash* (the Holy Temple) once stood. The Wall, which has been a site for prayer and pilgrimage for centuries, annually receives multiple 'visitors' of another type -- written prayers on pieces of paper wedged into the cracks of the ancient stones. Some letters are sent to the Wall by fax or email -- often for a small fee. Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz places hundreds of letters a year received by the post office addressed simply to "G-d in Jerusalem." Have you ever wondered what happens to all those notes?

Twice annually, Rabbi Rabinowitz supervises the removal of the notes that have been slipped between the stones of the ancient edifice. This past week, Rabbi Rabinowitz said, "We are now cleaning the stones of the Western Wall, we're collecting the notes . . . that were inserted in the past six months in the cracks of the Wall, we're talking about hundreds of thousands of notes if not more, if not millions, we ... are ensuring that no one can open these notes. We'll collect them in bags and then we'll bury them, G-d willing, in the Mount of Olives." Leaving notes of prayers and pleas has been adopted by members of many faiths around the world. It is common for Christian pilgrims travelling through the Old City of Jerusalem to stop by the Western Wall and leave a note.

For those unable to visit the Western Wall, some send a note with friends or family who will be traveling to the holy site. Others, desiring to have prayers said at the Western Wall, work with organizations such as [westernwallprayers.org](http://westernwallprayers.org), that arrange for individuals to personally offer specific prayer requests at the Western Wall. Regardless whether your prayers ascend to Heaven via the Western Wall --- don't underestimate the power of prayer.

#### *Passover*

Passover begins on Friday evening, April 4. Since the holiday begins on Shabbos, the regular cycle of Torah readings is interrupted with a reading that reflects the theme of the holiday. On the first day of Passover, Shabbos, the Torah reading is from Exodus 12: 21- 51. This reading describes the Exodus from Egypt and the Passover offering. On the second day of Passover, Sunday, the Torah reading is from Leviticus 22:26 -- 23:44. This reading describes journeying to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem on the three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot) and the counting of the Omer. May you and your families have a meaningful and joyous holiday.

#### *Rabbinic Ruminations*

Albert Einstein once said, "*I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.*" The curiosity of German graphic designer Benedikt Gross resulted in the creation of a fascinating project. Gross was flying into Los Angeles for the first time when he gazed out the jetliner's window and was mesmerized by the grid of shimmering turquoise swimming pools tiling the landscape below. The graphic designer recalls saying to himself, "I wonder how many pools there are?" The image of all those backyard oases visible only from the sky stuck with him. A few months later while at an MIT research lab, he met Joseph Lee, an L.A. native with a background in remote sensing and cartography. Over a lunch conversation, the two decided to take on the project of finding and mapping all the swimming pools in the Los Angeles basin.

They began with aerial imagery from the U.S. Geological Service. Gross and Lee expected to receive from the imagery a map of beautiful images, but instead received "digital noise and an ugly mishmash of lines." Turning to a service in India that turns bitmap images into vectors, within a short time they had an outline of tens of thousands of swimming pools. Continuing their work with complex computer mapping, they ended up with "The Big Atlas of LA Pools," a digital analysis of every swimming pool in the Los Angeles Basin. Their research, which fills 6,000 pages in 74 printed volumes and cost \$3700 to publish, counts 43,123 pools between the Hollywood Hills and San Pedro. As a spinoff from their project, the duo created a 22-

minute video, "[The L.A. Swimmer](#)," a swoosh of a ride across Los Angeles showing quick glimpses of backyard pools. One unintended result of the project: Gross and Lee have been talking with the L.A. Fire Department about using the maps to help locate pool water in case of fires.

We humans are naturally curious creatures -- we are born to explore. Even if we don't immediately sense the benefit of questioning and exploration, curiosity still has value because the journey of learning is its own reward. That's the same message we get on Passover. What does the wise child of the Haggada say? "*What are the testimonials, statutes and laws Hashem our G-d commanded you?*" Jewish learning is supposed to inspire us, and to push us to explore beyond what we already know. There's even titled a book [Swimming in the Sea of Talmud](#) because Jewish study leads us into the vast, challenging, and compelling unknown, which we do for the pure joy of learning something new. As numerous as the swimming pools in Los Angeles may be, they are not infinite. But human curiosity -- our drive to explore and learn and grow -- just might be.

### *Quote of the Week*

"F-E-A-R has two meanings: 'Forget Everything And Run' or 'Face Everything And Rise.' The choice is yours." ~ **Zig Ziglar** (1926-2012) Hilary Hinton "Zig" Ziglar, American author, salesman, motivational speaker.

### **Joke of the Week**

- There was a husband and wife celebrating their 60th birthdays. While walking along a beach, they spot an old bottle. The woman picks up the bottle and notices that it still has the cork intact. So, being curious as to what may be inside, she manages to get the cork out and out pops a genie. The genie tells the man and wife that they will be granted their deepest wish.
- The woman says, "I have always wanted to travel the world! I would like tickets to dozens of locations around the world."
- The genie snaps his fingers, and dozens of tickets appear. The woman is ecstatic!
- The genie turns to the husband.
- “What would you like?” he asks.
- He thinks—and very quickly says, “I would like a woman thirty years younger.”
- The genie nods, and waves her wand, and PRESTO ---
- The man is now 90 years old.