

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

If you want to say something works with smoothness and precision, you might say it runs like "clockwork" or "a well-oiled machine." If you're a knowledgeable baseball fan, you might say it goes like "Tinkers to Evers to Chance." Shortstop Joe Tinker, second baseman Johnny Evers and first baseman Frank Chance were members of a stellar early 20th Century Chicago Cubs infield. Their ability to turn a double play was immortalized in the 1910 baseball poem, "Baseball's Sad Lexicon" by Franklin Pierce Adams.

These are the saddest of possible words:

"Tinker to Evers to Chance."

Trio of bear cubs, and fleeter than birds,

Tinker and Evers and Chance.

Tinker, Evers, and Chance -- all inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1946 -- were part of the Chicago Cubs' World Series-winning teams in 1907 and 1908, their last World Series title. Cubs fans maintain that since 1908, the Chicago North Siders have simply had "a 100 year run of bad luck." Some attribute the Cubs futility to 'The curse of the Billy Goat.' In 1945 a fan was asked to leave a World Series game because his pet goat's odor was bothering other fans; that fan supposedly invoked a curse against the Cubs. In 1969 some superstitious fans attributed a monumental late-season Cubs collapse to an incident where a black cat (an omen of bad luck) walked behind the Cubs on-deck circle where captain Ron Santo was standing.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Shallow men believe in luck or in circumstance. Strong men believe in cause and effect." The words 'luck', 'chance' and 'coincidence' are not part of a Jewish vocabulary. While it is often difficult (if not impossible) to know why things happen, a solidly-founded belief in G-d will lead to the inescapable conclusion that there are no accidents. Everything -- even for the Chicago Cubs -- happens for a reason.

Parshas Shemini Leviticus 9:1 - 11:47

This week's Torah portion begins by discussing the events which occurred on the eighth and final day of the inauguration service of the Mishkan. After months of preparation, Aaron and his sons are finally installed as Kohanim in an elaborate service. Aaron blesses the people, and the entire nation rejoices as G-d's presence rests upon them. However, the excitement comes to an abrupt halt as Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, are consumed by a heavenly fire in the Mishkan while innovating an offering of incense on the altar. This incident stresses the need to perform the commandments only as G-d directed. Later, Moses consoles Aaron, who grieves in silence.

Have you ever wondered where the laws of kosher food come from? Parshas Shemini concludes with a listing of the kosher and non-kosher animals. The identifying signs of a kosher land animal are that it has split hooves and chews, regurgitates and re-chews its food. A kosher fish is one that has both fins and scales. All birds not included in the list of forbidden fowl are permitted. However, today the identities of these non-kosher birds are doubtful. Therefore, we're forbidden to eat any species of bird unless there is a well-established tradition that it is kosher. The Torah forbids all types of insects except for four species of locusts. Chocolate-covered grasshoppers, anyone? The laws of kashrut help us to be distinct and holy -- like G-d, Himself.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Researchers probing the deepest ocean have found a surprisingly high concentration of microbes, the latest evidence of organisms thriving in inhospitable environments that is reshaping scientists' understanding of the conditions necessary for life. The bacteria were found nearly 6.8 miles below sea level, on the floor of the Pacific Ocean's Mariana Trench, according to the researchers, whose findings were recently published by the journal Nature Geoscience. No light reaches that part of the ocean, where the temperature is an estimated 36 degrees Fahrenheit.

Researchers have previously found life -- in the form of organisms -- in a number of unlikely environments:

Inside deep-water ocean vents, despite high temperatures and lack of sunlight

Under the Antarctic ice sheet, where bacteria appear to have been living for millions of years
Inside rocks in Yellowstone National Park's hot springs
A foot below the surface of Chile's Atacama Desert, one of the driest places on Earth
At such depths, little is left of the plant matter on the ocean surface that, as it drifts downward, sustains fish and other ocean life. Filmmaker James Cameron, who last year dived in a submersible to the floor of the Mariana Trench, called it a "sterile, almost desert-like place."

What does it take to sustain human life? Ethics of the Fathers teaches, "Greet every person with a smiling and warm face!" A smile is not merely a kind thing to do, making the world a more pleasant place. A smile is an essential ingredient in the healthy continuity of the world. Even if we have nothing material to share with someone who is needy, we have in our possession something far more powerful and life-giving -- the warmth of friendly, human contact. Your smile can help to sustain a life, even in the most unlikely of environments.

Quote of the Week

Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is a sort of splendid torch, which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations. -- **George Bernard Shaw**

Joke of the Week

Consider the story of the butcher who laid an egg. A man ran into the butcher shop just before closing on Erev Shabbos. "You've got to help me," he said. "I told my wife I'd bring home a chicken for tonight's dinner, and I forgot! Do you have any chickens left?"

"Well, I'll see," the butcher said, and he went into the cooler. He found only one thin, scrawny chicken, which he brought for the customer to look over.

The man shook his head. "Haven't you got anything else?"

Hiding his irritation, the butcher headed back to the cooler, taking the chicken with him. There were no others, so after a few minutes he brought the same chicken out again. "Took me a while, but I found this one."

The customer sighed. "All right. I'll take 'em both."