

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Eikev August 8, 2015*

"You Are Where You Eat!"

This could only happen in Israel: A porcupine digging a burrow unearthed a perfect 1,400-year old oil lamp – only to have its prize seized by "archaeology cops" on a routine patrol to frustrate robbers. At the Horbat Siv ancient ruins – a Roman-Byzantine site in central Israel -- anti-antiquities theft inspectors found a remarkably well-preserved oil lamp that had burn marks, indicating that it had once been in use. Ira Horovitz from the anti-antiquities theft unit of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), said that "the porcupine is an excellent archaeologist, a relentless digger... It often happens that porcupines dig their burrows at the site of archaeological digs... he skillfully throws the dirt aside, and with it whatever archaeological findings are in his path." The incident took place this past March.

Porcupines found in Israel are stout, heavily built animals, with blunt, rounded heads, fleshy, mobile snouts, and coats of thick rounded or flattened spines. Conservationists have documented that some tigers and leopards have become man-eaters after having fought and been injured by porcupines, which indicates their ferocity and their lack of predators. Porcupines will eat most anything. Salty items are consumed with relish, including axe handles, canoe paddles, outhouses, and even automobile radiator hoses. As rodents go, porcupines are large, weighing up to 30 pounds, and they need big burrows that can easily stretch more than 45 feet. Regarding the recently discovered oil lamp in Israel, the IAA issued -- in jest -- the following warning: *"The IAA calls on all porcupines to avoid digging burrows at archeological sites and warns that digging at an archeological site without a license is a criminal offense."*

Parshas Eikev -- Deuteronomy 7:12 - 11:25

Moses continues to encourage the Children of Israel to trust in G-d and in the prosperity and health which will follow if they keep the Torah. If they are careful to observe even those 'minor' mitzvos that are usually 'trampled' underfoot, he promises that they will be the most blessed of the nations of the Earth. Moses reminds them of their numerous transgressions in the desert, including the mystifying sin of the Golden Calf. Moses describes the bountiful Land of Israel filled with wheat, barley, grapes, figs and pomegranates, a land of oil-yielding olives and date-honey. He teaches the people the second paragraph of the Shema which stresses the fundamental doctrine of reward for keeping the mitzvos and the consequences of non-compliance. All that G-d requires of us, Moses says, is to love G-d, revere Him, and to observe His Torah. Easier said than done! Parshas Eikev concludes with the promise that G-d will provide the Jewish people with protection if they observe the laws of the Torah. Many are familiar with the famous phrase (found in this week's portion), "Man does not live by bread alone." The less-familiar second half of the verse says, ". . . but by all that comes from the mouth of G-d." This important idea teaches that physical nourishment and external pleasures aren't sufficient for a satisfied life. Every human being has spiritual needs that must also be met.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Our environment shapes our behavior and actions -- even when it comes to eating.

-- Where you're eating: If your food doesn't taste so good, you might continue eating depending on your environment. A study showed that people ate the same amount of popcorn in a movie theater, whether it was old and stale or fresh and just-popped. Diners who sit in restaurant booths are more likely to order fatty foods and dessert. Those who sit close to the window or at those uncomfortable high-top tables are more likely to order salads.

-- Fast Food: Weight gain has a lot to do with opportunity and availability. Studies show that people who live close to take-out restaurants or pass by them on their way to work are more likely to be obese. Children living near fast-food restaurants are more likely to be overweight. Along similar lines, pregnant women who live within a half-mile of a fast-food restaurant are more likely to gain over 40 pounds during their pregnancy.

-- What your friends are ordering: Are your friends getting the fries or the salad? Researchers found that peer pressure did seem to have an effect on what people ordered at a restaurant. "We want to fit in with the people we're dining with," said study researcher Brenna Ellison, Ph.D., a food economist at the

University of Illinois. And the body type of your dining partner has an effect on what you eat. Research shows that if eating with someone overweight, you are more likely to make unhealthy food choices. -- The ambience: Harsh lighting and loud music can encourage you to eat more calories. Cornell researchers found that when lighting and music were made softer in restaurants, diners not only ate fewer calories but also enjoyed their food more.

Birds of a feather flock together. The people with whom you habitually associate are called your "reference group." According to research by social psychologist Dr. David McClellan of Harvard, your 'reference group' determines as much as 95% of your success or failure in life. Rambam (Maimonides) wrote: *Adam nimshach achar s'vivav* -- a person is profoundly influenced by their surroundings.

Quotes of the Week

The most important things are the hardest to say, because words diminish them. - **Stephen King**
That which we are capable of feeling, we are capable of saying. – **Cervantes** (Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, often simply called Cervantes, Spanish novelist, poet, and playwright. Major work, Don Quixote.)

Joke of the Week

A man was clearing out his attic when he came upon an old painting and a violin. Thinking they might be valuable, he took them to the auction house to be valued.

After studying them, the appraiser said, "Mr. Goldberg, I have good news and I have bad news."

"What's the good news?" Goldberg asked.

"The good news is that you have a Stradivarius and a Picasso," replied the appraiser.

"Fantastic! What's the bad news?"

"Well sir, the bad news is that Stradivarius was a very bad painter and Picasso was no good with violins."