

*Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Va'eschanan August 9, 2014*

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Last week, a retiring U.S. Marine got the surprise of his life — and a fitting one for a 21-year military veteran. Master Sergeant Jacinto Bernardo, an Iraq war veteran who recently retired after serving 21 years in the U.S. Marine Corps, asked his old Marine buddy Jeremy Epperson to watch his new home in Suisun, California, while he was stationed in Japan with his family. The home was a “major” fixer-upper because it was all the Bernardo family could afford.

Jeremy gladly agreed to watch his Marine brother's home, though he had much bigger plans in mind. While Jacinto was away, Jeremy raised money and support to do roughly \$70,000 in renovations to the Marine's house. He's named the renovation program “Homecoming Heroes.” Jeremy said, “I didn't think it was right for a person who retired, given 21 years and 50 percent of their pay to come back and spend every cent that they saved on fixing up a home,” he said. So in just ten days, Jeremy and numerous contractors and volunteers painted, installed new floors, redid the kitchen, and landscaped the property. Upon seeing his 'new' home, Sgt. Jacinto's tears came quickly. ([RAW VIDEO: Veteran's emotional reaction](#)) Jeremy said, “We did it for you. Don't step on your grass.” Through tears, Jacinto responded, “I don't deserve this.”

A good friend is a treasure more valuable than silver and gold. Ethics of the Fathers teaches, “..... *acquire for yourself a friend ...*” (1:6) How can one 'acquire' a friend? By acting like Jeremy Epperson in *being* a friend to others.

Parshas Va'eschanan Deuteronomy 3:23 - 7:11

Moses continues his final speech to the Children of Israel. He tells them how he entreated G-d to allow him to enter the land of Israel, but his request was denied. Moses was allowed, however, to see the Promised Land from the peak of Mount Pisgah.

Moses appeals to the people to keep the Torah and its commandments, telling them to neither add to nor subtract from its mitzvos. They are told to always remember the incredible Revelation they experienced at Mt. Sinai where every man, woman and child heard the presentation of the Ten Commandments. Moses repeats the Ten Commandments, with subtle differences between this version and the one found in the Book of Exodus. Did you ever wonder where the Shema comes from? It is found in this week's Torah portion. The Shema expresses our belief that G-d is One and states our commitment to love and serve Him. It exhorts us to transmit Torah to the next generation, and its laws should be remembered by a 'sign' upon one's hand and forehead (tefillin) and written on the doorposts of one's home (mezuzah).

Finally, Moses encourages the people to trust in G-d and remain faithful to the Torah. Intermarriage is prohibited, and the source that Jewish identity is transmitted through the mother is stated.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Fido is asleep by your side. Is he dreaming of you? Daisy took your hamburger off the kitchen counter, ate it for dinner, and is now slinking around with her ears drawn back. Does she feel guilty? Do dogs smile? What does Rover's tail wag mean? Neuroscientists have begun to answer such questions, giving us access to the once-secret inner lives of our canine companions and even translating their barks and wags so mere humans can comprehend them. At the forefront of this effort is Stanley Coren, a behaviorist from the University of British Columbia, who draws on decades of research to explore the psychological motivations behind dogs' everyday behaviors, as well as what science says about their barks, thoughts, and dreams.

Dr. Coren says that dogs have the same brain structures that produce emotions in humans. Dogs even have the hormone oxytocin, which in humans is involved with love and affection. So it seems reasonable to suggest that dogs also have emotions similar to ours. However, Dr. Coren says, it is important not to

go overboard: The mind of a dog is roughly equivalent to that of a human who is 2 to 2½ years old. A child that age clearly has emotions, but not all possible emotions, since many more complex emotions such as guilt, pride, contempt and shame emerge later in the path to adulthood. It is highly likely that dogs dream, and dogs are capable, researchers say, of smiling and laughing. But actions seeming to show a sense of guilt are likely expressions of the more basic emotion of fear. And depending upon the type of tail wag (slight, broad, slow, fast), Rover may be saying 'hello', 'I'm here', "I'm not challenging you", or "I'm ready for action".

A better understanding of animals will help us to help them, and make it easier to interact with them in a positive manner. So too, a better understanding of people will accomplish the same goals. Understanding other people -- who are significantly more complex than animals -- is a lifetime process. We can never know the totality of another person. A good place to begin is to consider the meaning and applicability of "Love your friend as yourself ..." (Leviticus 19:18)

Quote of the Week

The question should be, is it worth trying to do, not, can it be done. -- *Allard Lowenstein, 20th century American Congressman*

Joke of the Week

"I hope you didn't take it personally, rabbi," an embarrassed woman said after morning Shabbos services, "when my husband walked out during your sermon."

"I did find it rather disconcerting," the rabbi replied.

"It wasn't out of any disrespect to you," insisted the synagogue-goer. "Fred has been walking in his sleep since he was a child."