

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Vayigash December 27, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates ~

Zidan isn't a name usually heard at a *bris milah* (circumcision ceremony), but a New York couple gave their newborn son the moniker to honor a Druze policeman killed while responding to a terror attack on a Jerusalem synagogue last month. Alexander Chester, an attorney, said that he and his wife, Jennifer, a medical resident, wanted to make sure that Zidan Saif's name would be perpetuated within the Jewish community by naming their son Yaakov Zidan. "We wanted to have [Zidan's] name called among the Jewish people for all time," Alexander said. Zidan Saif, one of the first to arrive on the scene, played a key role in ending the terror attack before being shot at close range.

"The first time in his life that Zidan Saif entered a synagogue was on the last day of his life. I've entered a synagogue most of the days of my life, but on all those days combined I haven't had the impact that Zidan had just once," Alexander said. "Zidan Saif was a Jewish hero, and he deserves to have his name called among the Jewish people for all time. But he wasn't just a Jewish hero, he was a hero for humanity," the father added. Zidan Saif's widow, Rinal, was also very excited to hear about the Jewish couple's gesture to her husband. "When the baby grows up, everyone will ask him why his name is Zidan. And then he will explain that in 2014, a hero police officer was killed in the State of Israel, and people will remember and remind others of my husband," she said. "That keeps me strong. I know that Zidan's name will not be erased from the history of the state's defense, even abroad."

Ethics of the Fathers (4:17) teaches "there are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship. And the crown of a good name is superior to them all." The only crown we leave behind is the name we acquire through our good deeds. Blessed be the name of Zidan Saif, which will live on among the righteous of the nations of the world.

Parshas Vayigash Genesis 44:18 -- 47:27

Judah makes an impassioned plea to the powerful Egyptian ruler (Joseph, still in disguise) for Benjamin's life, claiming that Jacob would surely die from sorrow if he lost Benjamin. Judah offers to remain in Egypt as a slave in place of his younger brother. Unable to restrain himself any longer, Joseph reveals his identity to his stunned brothers and forgives them for selling him into slavery so many years before. Joseph then sends his brothers back to the land of Israel, laden with gifts, to bring Jacob and their families down to Egypt where they will live in the province of Goshen. Before Jacob leaves home, G-d appears to him in a 'vision of the night', reassuring him that He will be with them and that they will eventually return to the land of Israel as a great nation. After 22 years of separation, Jacob is reunited with his beloved son Joseph. Joseph embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy, and then brings his father to meet Pharaoh. The portion concludes by describing how Joseph uses his vast power to amass nearly all of the wealth of Egypt for Pharaoh's treasury.

Rabbinic Ruminations

You might not be able to order a *felafel* in Tzefat. But if you misunderstand someone as they're describing the upcoming Israeli elections, you'll be in luck. The expression "huh?" is practically universal, according to a recent study from the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in the Netherlands. A word like *Huh?* -- used as a repair initiator when, for example, one has not clearly heard what someone just said -- is found in roughly the same form and function in spoken languages across the globe. The study analyzed recordings of people speaking ten different languages, including Spanish, Chinese and Icelandic, as well as indigenous languages from Ecuador, Australia and Ghana. Not only did all of the languages have a word intended to initiate a quick clarification, but its form always resembled *huh?* It's not unusual for languages to have words or sounds in common: The English "number" and Spanish *numero*, for instance, share a Latin ancestor. And languages may adopt words from other languages (which is how words such as the slang OK spread widely). But it's a basic linguistic principle that when

there is no shared origin or word swapping, the word for a given thing will be arbitrarily different in different languages: So there's "house" in English, *maison* (French), *fángzi* (Chinese) and *huan* (Lao). *Huh?* may sound like just a grunt or cry. It could be an almost involuntary response to the phrase, "I'm more than a felaful doctor," for example. (*Huh?*) But linguists say it's a word. A laugh, cry or growl, however meaningful, isn't considered language; even a dog communicates sadness with a whimper. A true word is learned, and follows certain linguistic rules, depending on the language spoken. *Huh* fits this definition: For one thing, *huh* has no counterpart in the animal kingdom; for another, unlike innate vocalizations, children don't use it until they start speaking. All in all, the study concludes that *huh* is a bona fide word with a specific purpose "crucial to our everyday language."

Words are powerful. They can clarify misunderstandings, cause pain, or be a vehicle for many acts of benevolence. The Torah prohibits all forms of words that cause needless pain ("*onas dvarim*"), and encourages the use of positive speech as a *chesed*, a kindness. Choose your words carefully.

Quote of the Week

I count myself lucky, having long ago won a lottery paid to me in seven sunrises a week for life. -- **Robert Brault, Free-Lance Writer and Blogger**

Joke of the Week

Working people frequently ask retired people what they do to make their days interesting. Well, for example, the other day, my wife Myrtle and I went into town and visited a shop. When we came out, there was a cop writing out a parking ticket. We went up to him and I said, "Come on, man, how about giving a senior citizen a break?"

He ignored us and continued writing the ticket.

I called him a jerk. He glared at me and started writing another ticket for having worn out tires. So Myrtle called him a moron. He finished the second ticket and put it on the windshield with the first. Then he started writing more tickets. This went on for about 20 minutes. The more we harassed him, the more tickets he wrote. Just then our bus arrived, and we got on it and went home.

We weren't too concerned about the vehicle's owner, because the sticker on the back window said:
Down With Israel! I support Hamas!

We try to have a little fun each day now that we're retired. It's important at our age.