

*Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Vayishlach December 6, 2014*

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates ~

Theo Klopstra and Gerja Warners are putting their necks on the line. In the face of rising anti-Semitism in the Netherlands, Theo and Gerja, who are not Jewish, say they and their daughter decided to wear Star of David necklaces in public because they are "ashamed of what is happening in their country." When Gerja noticed the uptick in anti-Semitic events prompting some Jewish community members to remove the mezuzos from their doorposts and take off their head coverings in public, she began to get angry. The Jews, said Gerja, "have such an awful history of being hunted, abused, called names, and murdered just for being there."

Lacking a local Jewish community, the Klopstra family bought their necklaces from a synagogue in the next town. "I must tell you that we (do not have) some strange affection for your country," Theo said. Instead, the family says it is concerned with changing a destructive and anti-Semitic narrative, pushed forward by the European media. "If tomorrow some idiot says that Ebola is made by Israel lots of people would believe it," said Theo. By wearing their necklaces with pride and fielding questions from those who are curious, the Klopstra family hopes to increase tolerance for minorities in their community and help to combat rising anti-Semitic sentiment in their country.

Why should Christians and other non-Jews support the Jewish people and Israel? In Genesis (12:3), G-d told Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." The fight of the Jewish people and Israel is the fight of the righteous among the nations of the world.

Parshas Vayishlach Genesis 32:4 -- 36:43

Jacob and his family returned from the house of Laban to the land of Israel, only to find Esau heading toward them with 400 men, ready for battle. After preparing his family for war and praying to G-d for help, Jacob attempts to appease his brother by sending him a gift of many animals. After his family crosses the river to await the meeting with Esau, Jacob is left alone for an all-night 'confrontation' with an angel disguised as a man. Although Jacob is victorious, he is left limping from a hip-dislocation. Rejoining his family, Jacob encounters Esau who accepts him with an apparent new-found brotherly love. Jacob and Esau part ways in peace. Another crisis arises when Jacob's daughter Dinah is abducted and raped by Shechem, the prince of a town with the same name. Two of Jacob's sons, outraged at the humiliation caused to their sister, trick the town's residents into circumcising themselves on the condition that they would then be allowed to intermarry with Jacob's family. Simeon and Levi (two sons of Jacob) then decimate the entire city and save Dinah. Later in the portion, G-d blesses Jacob and gives him the additional name, Israel. Soon after, Rachel dies while giving birth to Benjamin, Jacob's twelfth son. Finally, Jacob returns home and is reunited with his father Isaac. The Torah portion concludes with a lengthy genealogy of Esau's family.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Is there a language lurking in the back of your mind? A recent study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Scientists* suggests that hearing a language during the first year or two of your life leaves an imprint that can be detected a decade or more later -- even though you might not have heard the language again and didn't understand a word of it.

A Canadian researcher devised an experiment that looked at three different groups of children ages 9 to 15. The first group was made up of children who were born in China, but then were adopted and developed French as their native language when they moved to Canada. The second group was made up of kids who were native French speakers and had never heard Chinese. The third group were children born in Canada and grew up speaking Chinese, but later began to acquire French as a second language around the same age that the adopted kids were learning French.

The children were placed in a functional MRI (fMRI) scanner to see activity in their brains. The scanner showed that the children in the first group -- even though they hadn't heard Chinese for a decade or more -- showed a similar unique pattern of brain activity to the third-group kids who had learned Chinese as a native language growing up in Canada. In other words, the children who had prior exposure to Chinese, though they no longer spoke the language, recognized the Chinese-like sounds as a form of language -- while other kids never exposed to Chinese (group two) heard them only as sounds.

The Talmud relates that the mother of the great Rabbi Yehoshua used to take her infant son to the Beit Midrash (Torah academy) while he was still in his crib so that even in infancy, he would absorb the words of Torah. Rabbi Yochanan later said about Rabbi Yehoshua, "Blessed is his mother!" (for causing her son to become such a great and holy man). The minds of children are sponges; let us not underestimate the power of early childhood influences.

Quote of the Week

Better three hours too soon than a minute too late -- *William Shakespeare*

Joke of the Week

My neighbor was bitten by a stray, rabid dog. I went to see how he was and found him writing frantically on a piece of paper. I told him rabies could be treated, and he didn't have to worry about a will.

He said, "Will? What will? I'm making a list of the people I want to bite."