

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Vayigash December 7, 2013

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

For a country that features the word *United* so prominently in its name, the U.S. is a fairly diverse place. We splinter along fault lines of income, education, religion, race, age and politics. Then too there's temperament. We're friendly or prickly, conventional or rebellious, feisty or laid-back. And it's no secret that a lot of that seems to be determined by -- or at least associated with -- where we live.

Now researchers have sought to literally map the American mood, with state-by-state ratings of personality and temperament. The study measures personality along five different spectra, with the Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism labels forming a handy acronym: OCEAN. West Virginia is the most neurotic state, Utah is the most agreeable and the folks of Wisconsin are the country's most extroverted, the study says. Using personality test data from over one million people, three distinct personality regions in the country have been identified. Want to know where you belong on this map? Here, each state is colored by the region it belongs to and shaded according to how strongly its personality matches that profile. <http://science.time.com/2013/10/22/the-united-states-of-attitude-an-interactive-guide-to-americas-moods/>

When we think about the personality of any individual, every person we know or meet is a unique mixture of various traits. If we assume a person's personality would contain just twenty characteristics, each of which can be rated on a ten-point scale, over 100 quadrillion different descriptions of people would be possible! The Talmud says, "Just as people's faces are different, so too, their character differs". One seeking to achieve outstanding interpersonal relationships must study human character to understand each person, and how best to help others.

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

Are there more sands of grain on all the beaches of the Earth, or stars in the sky? It's a question that every future scientist probably asked during that first trip to the beach as a child. Though it would be impossible to actually count the sand and stars, a group of scientists at the University of Hawaii recently came up with a reasonable way to get an estimate.

They began with postulating an average size for a grain of sand and by calculating the number of sand grains in a teaspoon. Then the number of beaches and deserts in the world were factored in. Multiplied all together, the number is staggering. Since you aren't likely to own a calculator with enough digits to represent the result, here it is in shorthand: 7.5×10^{18} grains of sand. In simpler, though equally as incomprehensible terms, that is 7 quintillion, 500 quadrillion grains. Or in terms simpler still: a lot.

Calculating the number of stars is even trickier. If we opt to limit our scope to the number of stars that are observable with the naked eye on a clear night from Earth, then the grains of sand will get an easy

victory. Even with minimal light pollution, we aren't likely to make out more than a few thousand stars. So scientists upped the ante by estimating the number of stars that are potentially observable by Hubble. If you include every object that twinkles in the night sky, from ordinary stars, to quasars, to red dwarfs, to whole galaxies, etc., then the number of stars in the observable universe is astounding. The number? 70 thousand million, million, million stars.

For the mathematically disinclined who may still wonder which number is larger: It's the stars, by far. The Jewish people are compared to stars and sand. G-d told Abraham, "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore ..." (Genesis 22:17) The comparison of Abraham's descendants to stars indicates the importance and greatness of every individual member of the Jewish people. But the Jewish people also have a collective mission, as indicated by their comparison to sand. A single grain of sand is of little consequence; but collectively these grains of sand form a border against the ocean. Together, as the Jewish people, we can accomplish great things.

Quote of the Week

Energy is the basis of everything. Every Jew, no matter how insignificant, is engaged in some decisive and immediate pursuit of a goal . . . It is the most perpetual people of the earth. -- *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Joke of the Week

Moishe and Shmuel had not seen each other in many years. Now they had a long talk trying to fill in the gap of those years by telling about their lives. Finally, Moishe invited Shmuel to visit him in his new apartment.

"I got a wife and three kids and I'd love to have you visit us." "Great. Where do you live?" "Here's the address. And there's plenty of parking behind the apartment. Park and come around to the front door, kick it open with your foot, go to the elevator and press the button with your left elbow, then enter! When you reach the sixth floor, go down the hall until you see my name on the door. Then press the doorbell with your right elbow and I'll let you in."

"Good. But tell me... what is all this business of kicking the front door open, then pressing elevator buttons with my right, then my left elbow?"

"You're coming empty-handed?"