

*Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*  
*Parshas Bo January 24, 2015*

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates ~*

Every year on his birthday, January 6, Ashlynn Marracino has written a letter to her late dad, who died from a brain aneurysm in 2010, in the hope of 'receiving a sign that he's there'. And 2015 proved to be the year she finally got it after a restaurant owner, 400 miles away, wrote back to the 16-year-old and prompted a flurry of good wishes from hundreds of others.

Ashlynn wrote a letter to her deceased father on the side of a helium balloon and 'sent it to heaven.' Her message read, *"I've been playing softball for 11 years now. Can you believe it? I Hope you helped me out with all those home runs. I don't like how I never had you in my life. It's not fair. Show me a sign please. Anything to let me know you're there. I miss you so much and I want you back."* Ashlynn's father had been in prison until she was 10, allowing them only a year together before he died.

On finding the deflated balloon outside her restaurant, Lisa Swisley decided to share the letter on a pay-it-forward website she had recently started – leading to hundreds of people sending packages and messages of support to the teenager. Ashlynn, shocked when she received a response, said, "I didn't think anybody would find it. I told (my Dad) to show me a sign, and I think this is it. It's a sign not to hold grudges, to forgive really easily, that he loves me and not be down or get down on myself."

G-d's continual love for His children is often described in the Torah using the metaphor of a parent and a child; a (healthy) parent will always love their child regardless of their actions. *Banim atem I'Hashem Elokaichem ....*" (Deut.14:1) (*"You are children to Hashem, your G-d..."*) We must be cognizant of the signs Hashem continually sends His children and His love for them.

*Parshas Bo Exodus 10:1 -- 13:16*

This week's portion begins with the eighth plague that G-d brings upon the Egyptians as the land is covered by locusts, destroying all the remaining crops. After the plague is removed at Pharaoh's behest, he once again refuses to set free the Jewish people, and the ninth plague of darkness encompasses the land. When that plague ends, Pharaoh becomes even more defiant about not freeing the slaves, at which point Moses warns Pharaoh about the upcoming tenth plague, the death of the firstborn. The Torah then interrupts the narrative with the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a nation -- the sanctification of Rosh Chodesh (the new month), beginning with the month of Nisan. G-d teaches Moses about the Korban Pesach (Passover offering) and the remainder of the laws of the Passover holiday, which Moses then transmits to the Jewish people.

At midnight of the appointed night the plague strikes, with every non-Jewish first-born dying, including Pharaoh's own son. Pharaoh awakes, running through the streets (presumably while still in his pajamas) to tell Moses that he now consents to send the Jewish people from his country. The children of Israel travel forth in a hurry with the great wealth they have just been given by the Egyptians. The Torah portion concludes with various mitzvos relating to the Exodus.

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

Are we alone in the universe? As much as we'd like to think that we are not the only intelligent species in the galaxies, this may not be the case. As new research (<http://arxiv.org/abs/1409.2506>) conducted by Hebrew University astrophysicist Prof. Tsvi Piran suggests, due to powerfully destructive gamma ray bursts in certain locations in our galaxy and others, the chances are slim that complex intelligent life, similar or more advanced than our own, exists in the known universe.

Gamma ray bursts are known as the 'brightest electromagnetic event to occur in the known universe,' in association with cataclysmic events in space. A nearby gamma ray burst (GRB) can be a threat to life. Using recent determinations of the rate of GRBs, Prof. Piran's research found that the probability of a lethal GRB is much larger in the inner Milky Way, making it inhospitable to life. At the periphery of the

Milky Way -- where Earth is found -- exist the safest environments for life. It turns out that real estate agents are right: What really matters is location, location, location! To put Prof. Piran's research into perspective, of the estimated 100 billion galaxies in the known universe, only about one in ten may be able to support complex life comparable to that on Earth, much less than what was previously thought. While the chances of intelligent lifeforms existing in the physical universe are low, that doesn't mean we're alone. *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me (Psalm 27)*. Even when we feel at our most alone, we are never alone because G-d is with us.

### *Quote of the Week*

An error doesn't become a mistake until you refuse to correct it. -- **O.A. Battista**

### **Joke of the Week**

I enjoyed theater arts in high school until I experienced a somewhat traumatic experience. One day during a performance I didn't notice a hole in the stage floor. I accidentally stepped through the hole, and sank up to my knees. I apologized to the audience for my clumsiness. But a heckler in the back of the theater shouted: "Don't worry! It's just a stage you're going through!"