

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Pinchas July 11, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Every cloud has a silver lining -- even a drought. An 84-year-old Washington state woman will soon hold her 1953 university class ring, lost six decades ago, after it was found in a dried-up West Texas lake. Elizabeth Clark lost her Howard Payne University class ring in 1954 in Lake Nasworthy when she and her future husband went for a picnic and waded into the water. Elizabeth said she wasn't certain where she had lost the ring -- after discovering it was missing, she looked around her home before going back to search at the lake.

After years of drought, the ring revealed itself in the lake bed and it was found in March. Someone from the school's alumni association drove to San Angelo to retrieve the ring and was able to identify it from the initials — AEL for Addie Elizabeth Little — inside the band. “I worked hard for that ring,” Elizabeth said. “I'm grateful it was found and that it was in good shape after 60 years.” The ring, which is 10-karat gold with a blue stone, needed some cleaning up by a local jeweler. Elizabeth's daughter, Donna Clark-Love of Houston, said her mother was delighted. “She cried, she just couldn't believe it,” she said. “This was like the highlight of her life. She is just thrilled.” The ring is particularly meaningful to Elizabeth, one of 16 children, and the only one in her family who finished college.

Can something that seems bad be something good in disguise? Absolutely. It is important to train oneself to look positively upon life's situations. Often what appears as 'bad' or 'negative' ends up being a blessing. What can we do to look at challenging situations in a positive light? A Hebrew expression, *gam zu l'tova*, means 'this too is for the best.' When things don't seem to be going your way, say *gam zu l'tova*. At times, hidden blessings and 'good mistakes' turn out to be the sweetest blessings of all.

Parshas Pinchas Numbers 25:10 - 30:1

In last week's Torah portion we found the Jewish hero Pinchas saving the day for the Jewish people by publicly executing the Jewish tribal head, Zimri, and his Midianite girlfriend, Kazbi. Those two had desecrated the Name of G-d and His Torah by having relations in plain view of Moses and the entire Jewish leadership. (I suppose you could say it was the very first 'Kazbi Show') This week, Pinchas is rewarded for sanctifying the Name of G-d and is granted the blessing of peace and priesthood (Kehuna). Pinchas' zealous response saves the Jewish people from a plague which had broken out in the camp.

Five righteous daughters of Tzelofchad file a claim with Moses: In the absence of a brother, they request their deceased father's share in the Land of Israel. Moses asks G-d for a ruling. The Almighty responds that the claim of these five women who so dearly love the Land of Israel is, indeed, just. Moses is told that he will ascend a mountain to view the Land that the Jewish people will soon inherit, though he will not be allowed to enter. Moses asks G-d to appoint a successor. Do you know who is chosen? Joshua, Moses' dedicated assistant and student. The Torah portion concludes with a lengthy description of the special offerings brought on various festivals. These sections are also read from the Torah throughout the year on the appropriate holidays.

Rabbinic Ruminations

If presented with a choice of items arranged in a row from left to right, which one would you choose? Remember Monty Hall and the classic game show, "Let's Make a Deal?" Contestants were asked to make this kind of decision. They were invited to pick between Door Number 1, Door Number 2 and Door Number 3. A prize was hidden behind the "right" door. Guess which door contestants were more likely to pick? Door Number 2.

This is consistent with research that shows that whenever items are arranged in a row from left to right, we have a tendency to choose the middle option. Psychologists call this the "Center Stage Effect." Researchers have replicated this with objects arranged vertically as well. Five pairs of identical white socks were pinned in a vertical array. As with the studies of horizontal options, participants showed a preference for the ones in the middle. In another study, 71% selected the middle chair from a row of

three chairs. Whether people were choosing a product from a grocery shelf, deciding which bathroom stall to use, or marking a box on a questionnaire, they avoided the ends and tended to make their selection from the middle.

The fact that our attention is consistently drawn to the center draws attention to . . . how we pay attention. The Torah often reveals how G-d uses supernatural signs to get people to pay attention to Him. In Exodus, Moses notices a burning bush that is not consumed by the fire. G-d speaks to Moses out of the burning bush once he pays attention to what is occurring. However, our daily lives are filled with frequent 'small miracles'. In our daily prayers we thank G-d for "Your miracles which are with us daily, and for Your continual wonders and kindnesses." Because we become accustomed to life and nature, we rarely see the levers and pulleys of the small and hidden miracles that surround us. G-d is certainly with us and speaks to us. We need only to open our eyes and . . . pay attention.

Quote of the Week

A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on. -- *Sir Winston Churchill* (1874-1965)

Joke of the Week

Izzy is sitting in synagogue one Shabbos morning when he falls asleep and starts to snore. The synagogue *gabbai* (assistant) quickly comes over to him, taps him softly on his shoulder and says, "Please stop your snoring, Izzy, you're disturbing the others in the shul."

"Now look here," says Izzy, "I always pay my membership in full, so I feel I have a right to do whatever I want."

"Yes, I agree," replies the *gabbai*, "but your snoring is keeping everybody else awake."