

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

How would you act if your net worth was in *the billions*? Would it change who you are? Would you be able to live a relatively normal life? David Cheriton, a Stanford professor who has an estimated net worth of \$1.3 billion from Google shares and other investments, hates the idea of living like a billionaire. "I'm actually quite offended by that sort of thing," he said in a 2006 interview. "These people who build houses with 13 bathrooms and so on, there's something wrong with them." Cheriton called himself "spoiled" for taking a windsurfing vacation in Hawaii, and in a recent Forbes profile said that his biggest recent splurge was his 2012 Honda Odyssey.

Chuck Feeney's net worth is currently \$2 million -- but the co-founder of Duty Free Shoppers has donated more than \$4 billion to disadvantaged children and public health initiatives, all while going to great lengths to remain anonymous. Feeney is a Depression-era veteran with a strict personal motto: "I try to live a normal life, the way I grew up. I set out to work hard, not get rich." According to his biographer, "He (Feeney) has no ego . . . He always chooses the second-cheapest wine from the wine list. When we traveled together he was always dressed like a down-at-heel American tourist."

The Torah informs us that Moses was more humble than anyone on the face of the earth. True humility leads to modesty, with a life of joy and peace that soon follows. Modesty frees you from the need to appear to others to be more than you really are, enabling you to enjoy life. Your main focus will not to be liked and respected by others, but a byproduct of your appropriate humility and modesty. What does G-d require of us? "...to act justly, love true loyalty, and to walk humbly with your G-d." (Micah 6:8)

Parshas Shelach Numbers 13:1 - 15:41

Moses is pressed by the Jewish people to send twelve spies to the Land of Canaan (later to be called the Land of Israel). Forty days later they return carrying a gigantic cluster of grapes and two other large fruits. Ten of the spies warn that the inhabitants of the land are enormous in size and that the land 'consumes its inhabitants'. They convince the people that the land can't be conquered. Caleb and Joshua retain their faith in G-d, insisting that the Jewish people can, indeed, conquer the land.

The people weep and proclaim that they'd rather return to Egypt. This tenth expression of a profound lack of faith in G-d prompts a Divine decree that entry into the Land should be delayed forty years. This decree was made on the ninth of the Hebrew month of Av -- known as Tisha B'Av. Numerous other tragedies occurred on Tisha B'Av, including the destruction of the first and second Temples and the expulsion of Spanish Jewry in 1492.

Parshas Shelach concludes with the command to place fringes (tzitzis) on the corners of a four-cornered garment. Tzitzis help us to remember to fulfill all of the Divine commandments. This reminds me of the story of the rabbi who asked his synagogue's Board of Directors if they would supply him with a new talis once every six months. They told him, "We're sorry, Rabbi. We can't afford the fringe benefits."

Rabbinic Ruminations

What do John Lennon, Johnny Cash, George Harrison, Led Zeppelin, Madonna, and Black Eyed Peas have in common? Hint: It is NOT that they were or are musicians. Answer: They were all successfully sued or forced to settle charges of musical plagiarism. Most cases of plagiarism are found in academia, where documents are typically essays or reports. Plagiarism can be found in virtually any field, including scientific papers, art designs, and source code. However, proving *music plagiarism* -- the use or close imitation of another author's music while representing it as one's own original work -- presents special challenges.

To begin with, some incidence of accidental or "unconscious" music plagiarism is possible or even likely. Any music that follows rules of a musical scale (such as the seven-note scale which is the foundation of most contemporary music) is limited by the ability to use a small number of notes.

Second, according to U.S. copyright law, musicians who accuse others of stealing their work must prove "access" -- the alleged plagiarizer must have heard the song -- and "similarity" -- the songs must share unique musical components, though it is difficult to define what is "similarity". And finally, copying and not crediting songs and 'recycling lyrics' was common in the folk music tradition. Support of that attitude remains pervasive today. In 2012, when Bob Dylan was questioned over his alleged music plagiarism he responded, "It's an old thing – it's part of the tradition. It goes way back". In 1998, B.B. King stated on the issue, "I don't think anybody steals anything; all of us borrow."

The Torah says, "Distance yourself from any false thing..." (Exodus. 23:7) This passage embraces all manner of dishonesty, including the less-than-obvious. Plagiarism may not seem to be as clearly wrong as stealing a book; however, it is still a "false thing" to use another's words without attribution. Additionally, giving credit where credit is due fulfills the positive dictum of, "One who quotes something in the name of the one who said it brings redemption to the world." (Ethics of the Fathers 6:6) We bring 'redemption' by acting to bring the light of truth into the world.

Quote of the Week

If pain doesn't lead to humility, you have wasted your suffering -- *Katerina Stoykova-Klemer*

Joke of the Week

Two gas company servicemen, a senior training supervisor and a young trainee, were out checking meters in a suburban neighborhood. They parked their truck at the end of the alley and worked their way to the other end. At the last house, a woman looking out her kitchen window watched the two men as they checked her gas meter.

Finishing the meter check, the senior supervisor challenged his younger coworker to a foot race down the alley back to the truck to prove that an older guy could outrun a younger one.

As they came running up to the truck, they realized the lady from that last house was huffing and puffing right behind them. They stopped and asked her what was wrong.

Gasping for breath, she replied, "When I see two men from the gas company running as hard as you two were, I figured I'd better run too!" (from Moshe Pinto)