

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*  
*Parshas Korach June 20, 2015*

*“Life: 10% How You Take It, 90% How You Make It”*

Talk about a sticky situation.

President Obama, in India for a state visit this past January, was chided by local press after he was spotted chewing gum during a parade. The president's habit also drew a similar reaction from Chinese netizens when he attended a November summit in Beijing with gum in his mouth. Following the incident in China, columnist Charles Krauthammer voiced his complaint: “My mother used to say, ‘Don't chew gum.’ And that was just in class . . . In China, chewing gum is a sign of disrespect.” It's not that the president chews gum for fun. A longtime smoker, Obama reportedly chews Nicorette to help kick the habit. He says it isn't about vanity or disrespect. It's an alternative to smoking in public. His aides described his quest to kick cigarettes as a “lifelong struggle.” “I was one of these teenagers” who smoked, he said in 2009. “And so I know how difficult it can be to break this habit when it's been with you for a long time.”

Given the circumstances, President Obama might not deserve to be chewed out (pun intended) for his gum habit. But the issue brings to the fore consideration of two forms of behavior: Etiquette and ethics. Rabbi J.B Soloveitchik explains that ethics require a person to do what is right even when in private, and nobody sees him. In contrast, etiquette is a matter of civility and manners, which is dependent on people's opinion. One who focuses on ethics, the Rabbi says, is liable to forget about etiquette without consideration of human dignity. Chasidic literature talks of a foolish chasid who saw a extremely small person, went over to him, and enthusiastically blessed in a loud voice, “*Baruch meshaneh habriyot.*” (“Blessed is He who created unusual creatures”) In a rush to do mitzvot, don't treat others as “mitzvah objects.” Always be cognizant of the respect and honor due to others.

*Parshas Korach Numbers 16:1 - 18:32*

This week's Torah portion begins with the infamous rebellion led by Korach against his cousins, Moses and Aaron, claiming that the two of them had usurped power from the rest of the Jewish people. Korach, motivated by jealousy and a desire for honor, rejected Moses' authority and claimed that the appointment of Aaron as *Kohen Gadol* (Head Kohen) was motivated by nepotism. Korach cleverly persuaded 250 judges and others from disaffected groups to become his followers in the rebellion. A frequent theme in the Torah is: Sooner or later G-d always gets the last word. In Korach's case, it was sooner. What was the result of the rebellion? G-d made the earth open up to swallow Korach, the ringleaders of the rebellion, and their families. Fire consumed the remainder of the 250 rebels. The story of Korach's rebellion concludes with an act of reconciliation -- and surprisingly, a U.S. Presidential reference. The staffs of the leaders of the 12 tribes were placed near the Ark of the Covenant. To prove that the tribe of Levi and Aaron was Divinely chosen, Aaron's staff sprouted leaves, almond blossoms and even almonds. I suppose you could say that this miracle made Aaron ....Chief of Staff!

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

Imagine visiting a Walmart Supercenter and peering inside a case that contains a handful of watches in the \$5,000 – \$10,000 price range. These watches are placed at the side of the display case near the main aisle, so they're likely the first watches you see as you approach the case. Between their location and appearance, you can't help but look at the \$5,000, \$6,000+ watches. The \$950 Luminox Men's Ultimate SEAL Chronograph you see two steps away looks surprisingly inexpensive. “I can afford that,” you hear yourself thinking. And the \$89 sports watch? Why not pick one up for weekend hikes and working out -- they're almost giving them away! There probably aren't many impulse purchases of the small selection of high-end watches; chances are, their main value to Walmart lies in the comparison or contrast.

Psychologists call this the “contrast principle.” It is used in sales all the time. Merchandisers know shoppers will be delighted with an item that seems inexpensive in comparison to something considerably more pricey. The contrast principle is not limited to retail. In a [study](#), male college students rated photos

of potential blind dates as less attractive if they had just watched Charlie's Angels. Apparently it was the heightened attractiveness of the female stars that made the blind date seem less attractive. India's government cleverly used the contrast principle in proclaiming their Mars mission "cheaper than the movie *Gravity*." CNN later ran the story "India's \$74 million Mars mission cost less than 'Gravity' movie," while NBC News explained "Why India's Mars Orbiter Mission Cost Less Than Gravity Movie." This framing persuasively communicated the perception that India is a low-cost high-tech hub, and desirable destination for research and development investment.

Aldous Huxley said, "*There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.*" How does one acquire the perception for positive self awareness? When Moses turns aside to look at the burning bush, G-d says to him, "*Take your shoes off your feet, the place you are standing on is holy ground.*" (Exodus.3:5) The Hebrew word *regel* (foot) is built from the same root letters as *hergel* (habit). "Take your shoes off your feet" can also be understood as "Revisit your habits." The Sefas Emes teaches, "the opposite of habit is renewal." Revisit how you have habitually viewed the world. A different perspective may uncover new, precious blessings.

### *Quote of the Week*

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." --  
*Shakespeare, Hamlet*

### **Joke of the Week**

"My son," says Mrs. Levi, "is a physicist."

"My son," says Mrs. Greenberg, "is president of an insurance company."

"My son," says Mrs. Goldblatt, "is the head of a law firm and president of the bar association."

"My son," says Mrs. Miller, "is a rabbi."

"A rabbi?," Mrs. Levi, Mrs. Greenberg, and Mrs. Goldblatt exclaim. "What kind of career is *that* for a Jewish boy?"