

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason *Parshas Chukas June 27, 2014*

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

How do you say cupcake in Hebrew? Hebrew was born with the Torah, and our tradition tells us that G-d created the Torah 2,000 years before He created the universe as a blueprint for creation. But how do you order ice cream in our ancient tongue? Words for computer, eyeglasses or matches don't appear in the classic texts, so linguists at the Hebrew Language Academy coin new words for terms that didn't exist in the Bible. Hebrew is based on "roots," patterns of letters that are the building blocks of the language. And more than half of the roots in modern Hebrew -- usually three-letter combinations -- come straight from the Bible. As an example, *machshev*, computer, is derived from *chashav*, to think. Other modern words are adaptations taken directly from Biblical texts. *Chashmal*, the modern Israeli Hebrew word for electricity, was inspired from the Book of Ezekiel, which used this word to explain what the appearance of some kind of brightness was like. In an ancient Aramaic translation of a Biblical passage, manna from heaven is described as thin as frost, or *glida*. Today, *glida* is the frosty stuff you order at the ice cream parlor.

What about cupcake? The Hebrew Language Academy has posted two options online for the public to choose from. So far the more popular choice is *ugoneet*, which in English translates to "mini-cake." The other contender is *mufeen mekushat*, or "decorated muffin." These alternatives to cupcake don't sound particularly palatable -- so at birthday parties across Israel, a cupcake may just stay a cupcake.

Parshas Chukas Numbers 19:1 - 22:1

This week's action-packed portion begins with the paradox of the Red Heifer, a mitzvah we are asked to perform though unable to understand its purpose and reason. The narrative then jumps to the death of the prophetess Miriam. The Jewish people are then left without water, since the miraculous well which had accompanied them in the desert existed only in her merit. G-d commands Moses and Aaron to speak to a particular rock so it will miraculously produce water; Moses strikes it with his staff instead, and G-d tells the two leaders they will not enter the Promised Land. What did Moses do wrong?

One classic approach suggests that Moses' sin was that he became angry (he said to the Jewish people, 'Listen now, you rebels'). Although the best among us can occasionally lose our temper, teachers and parents carry a special responsibility to be good role models for their students and children. Little pitchers have big ears! Later in the portion, the king of Edom refuses to let the Jewish people pass through his borders, causing them to take a longer route. Aaron dies and is buried on Mount Hor. The Children of Israel sing a song of praise about the well of Miriam. The portion concludes with the battles and victories over Sichon, the king of Emori, and Og, the king of Bashan.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Would you consider yourself more of a "dog person" or a "cat person"? Virtually any discussion among pet owners is bound to reveal that there are dog people and there are cat people. In some cases, the depth of feeling for their chosen species can be quite intense. Some people seem to be quite exclusive in their preferences, liking either dogs or cats and loathing the other species. Cats appear to be much easier to hate: 15 percent of the adults questioned in an Associated Press poll said they disliked cats a lot while the number who said they disliked dogs a lot was only 2 percent.

Can your preference for dogs or cats reveal information about your personality? Sam Gosling, a psychologist at the University of Texas in Austin, recently conducted a study in which 4,565 individuals were asked whether they were dog people, cat people, neither, or both. These individuals also completed a personality survey that measured a number of traits including conscientiousness, openness, neuroticism and agreeableness. It was discovered that people who identified themselves as dog people tended to be more extroverted and eager to please others, while those who described themselves as cat people tended to be more introverted and curious. These results might have important implications in the field of pet therapy. By using personality screenings, therapists might be able to match people in

need with animals that are best suited to their personalities.

Judaism places great stress on proper treatment of animals. Unnecessary cruelty to animals is strictly forbidden, and in many cases, animals are accorded the same sensitivity as human beings. The Torah has always recognized the link between the way a person treats animals and the way a person treats human beings. Jacob, Moses, and David were all shepherds, people who cared for animals. The Talmud specifically states that Moses was chosen for his mission because of his skill in caring for animals.

Quote of the Week

People do not lack strength; they lack will. -- *Victor Hugo*

Joke of the Week

Jack finds an old trunk in the attic. Looking in it, he discovers his father's old suit jacket. He puts his hand in the pocket and comes up with a shoe repair ticket for Herman's on West 53rd, dated January 14th, 1962. He can barely believe it -- an unclaimed ticket 52 years old! Weeks later, Jack happens to be in the area of West 53rd and wanders over to see where the shoe repair was. He can't believe his good luck, a shoe repair store is still there. He wanders in and tells the story of finding the ticket to the old man. The man says his name is Herman and has owned the shop for 60 years. "Gimme the ticket," says Herman and wanders to the back of the shop. Jack is amazed. What good fortune! What a coincidence! Only in America!
Herman comes back. "I've got your shoes. They'll be done tomorrow!"