

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

You've certainly heard the aphorism "nice guys finish last". The full phrase, attributed to baseball manager Leo Durocher in 1939, is: "Take a look at them. They're all nice guys, but they'll finish last. Nice guys. Finish last." The Los Angeles Dodgers may or may not make the playoffs this year, but star outfielder Matt Kemp certainly qualifies as a "nice guy". Kemp, a perpetual All-Star center fielder, was asked to come by the stands after a recent game to sign a ball for a fan who was fighting a "tough battle". Not only did Kemp come by, but he made the fan's year by signing a ball ... giving him his hat ... his jersey top and finally, his shoes. This happened in San Francisco, where the Dodgers had just lost three close games. So baseball-wise, Kemp probably wasn't in the best of moods. But he still hit a grand slam with his classy and generous move. (You can see the video here:

<http://www.vinscullyismyhomeboy.com/2013/05/matt-kemp-gives-fan-his-hat-jersey-and.html>)

Some of the best things we can do for others is when the demand for reciprocity is absent. True kindness -- known in Hebrew as *chesed shel emes* -- is when you do an act of kindness for someone with no expectation that the person will reciprocate. The classic example of *chesed shel emes* is attending a funeral or assisting with the needs of the deceased. The person to whom you are honoring will not be able to do anything for you in return. Some of the best performances of star athletes like Matt Kemp don't end up on a scoreboard or a stat sheet. Everyone can hit a home run by performing a kindness that is a *chesed shel emes*.

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

In 2005, Gallup conducted a poll that asked students to name the school subject that they considered to be the most difficult. Not surprisingly, mathematics came out on top of the difficulty chart. Do you struggle with math? If so, maybe you can get help from a friendly . . . plant. Scientists in Britain recently discovered that plants do complex arithmetic calculations to make sure they have enough food to get them through the night. "The capacity to perform arithmetic calculation is vital for plant growth and productivity," Dr. Alison Smith, a metabolic biologist who helped make the discovery, explained. Researchers found that plants used their starch at a steady rate throughout the night, so that about 95 per cent of their stock had been used up by dawn each day. When light conditions were changed to make night arrive unexpectedly early or late, the plants adapted by slowing or increasing their rate of starch usage to ensure their reserves lasted until dawn. This indicated that they had made a new calculation based on their internal clock, which knows the amount of time left until morning. The scientists even attempted to trick the plants by introducing windows of sunlight during the night but each time they were able to adjust their starch use accordingly, demonstrating that the balance was being continuously computed throughout the night. Professor Martin Howard, who was involved in the study,

said that this is "the first concrete example in biology of such a sophisticated arithmetic calculation" at a fundamental biological level.

The word in Hebrew for mathematics is *chesbon*. A *chesbon* can also refer to a spiritual accounting. Using stylish prose, the Torah (Numbers 21:27) says, "therefore the poets (*moshlim*) say 'come to Cheshbon -- let it be built and established as the city of Sichon' ". Allegorically, the *moshlim* refers to those who rule over themselves and say, "come let us make a calculation (*cheshbon*). Let us think about life, and weigh the benefit gained by directing our actions in a proper manner". Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese military general and philosopher, said, "The general who wins the battle makes many calculations in his temple before the battle is fought. The general who loses makes but few calculations beforehand." Whether we're good at math (like plants) or not, each of us can make a spiritual accounting.

Quote of the Week

You know you are getting old when the candles cost more than the cake. -- *Bob Hope*

Joke of the Week

A woman called Mount Sinai Hospital (pre-HIPAA).

She said, "Mount Sinai Hospital? Hello. Darling, I'd like to talk with the person who gives the information about the patients. But I don't want to know if the patient is better or doing like expected, or worse, I want all the information from top to bottom, from A to Z. I'd like to know the information about Rose Finkel, in Room 302. "

The voice on the other end of the line said, "Finkel. Finkel. Let me see. Feinberg, Farber--Finkel. Oh yes, Mrs. Finkel is doing very well. In fact, she's had two full meals, her blood pressure is fine, and if she continues this way, her doctor is going to send her home Tuesday at twelve o'clock."

The woman said, "Thank G-d! That's wonderful! She's going home at twelve o'clock! I'm so happy to hear that. That's wonderful news."

The guy on the other end said, "From your enthusiasm, I take it you must be one of the close family."

She said, "What close family? I'm Rose Finkel! My doctor doesn't tell me anything!"