

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Beha'aloscha June 6, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

A veteran cab driver has learned a costly lesson after agreeing to transport a man from California to North Dakota. Enaytayullah Hoseny, met 25-year-old Matthew Blackhanson at the Sacramento Greyhound station. Blackhanson hopped in the cab and asked if Hoseny knew where North Dakota was. He didn't, but punched it into his GPS and found out that it would take 22-hours and 15-minutes to get to Mandan, ND. The cabbie quoted a price that came into his head -- \$1200. The prospective passenger handed over \$240 cash and agreed to sign a hand-written contract that he would pay the rest on arrival. The problem: Once they got to North Dakota, the passenger had no money to pay up.

Hoseny called the police who arrested Blackhanson on the spot. Hoseny was left miles away from home, out of cash and out of gas. Without any options and needing rest, he spent the night in a local homeless shelter. The next day, the cabbie found some compassionate folks who filled up his gas tank and gave him food and cash. After eventually making it back to his home, Hoseny said he urged all taxi drivers never to take a long-distance fare without getting the money upfront. "I tell all the taxi drivers in the world, do not do this. This is so crazy and risky and even stupid," Hoseny said. As it happened, Blackhanson was getting a serious discount. According to the taxi meter at the end of the trip, it should have cost \$4,800.

The Torah says, "*Tamim Tihyeh Im Hashem Elokecha*" -- "*Go innocently with G-d*" (Deut. 18:13) One should go innocently and be fully trusting when G-d is your partner. But when dealing with unfamiliar people, be cautious: Like Enaytayullah Hoseny, you might get taken for a ride.

Parshas Beha'aloscha Numbers 8:1 - 12:16

Beha'aloscha (Hebrew for "when you step up") is thematically diverse, beginning with the daily lighting of the golden menorah in the Mishkan. The Levites are initiated into the Tabernacle service. The Torah then describes the celebration of Passover in the second year in the desert, complete with the bringing of the *Korban Pesach* (Passover offering). Some men could not bring the offering due to ritual impurity, and were thus commanded to celebrate *Pesach Sheni*, a 'make-up Passover' a month later. Lesson: second chances are available. Additionally, the standard procedure by which the Jewish people would break camp to travel in the desert is described.

Soon after leaving Mt. Sinai, the people begin to kvetch (to complain and grumble incessantly, as in the title of the classic novel 'Kvetcher in the Rye'). Spurred by the mixed multitude of insincere converts who joined the Jewish people upon leaving Egypt, the complaining is directed toward the manna, their daily miraculous portion of heavenly bread. G-d sends a massive flock of quail which the people gather to eat; those who had complained about the lack of food overstuff themselves and die during this supernatural event. The portion concludes with Miriam speaking *loshon hara* (defamatory words) to Aaron about their brother Moses. She is punished by G-d with *tzaraas* (a skin condition indicating a spiritual deficiency) and is quarantined outside the camp for seven days.

Rabbinic Ruminations

"I don't care what you think unless it is about me." ~ Kurt Cobain

Narcissism is the vain admiration of one's own physical or mental attributes, that derives from arrogant pride. Narcissism, a concept in psychoanalytic theory, is also considered a social or cultural problem. Almost comical in their exaggeration, narcissists are indifferent to who you are or what you have to say -- unless, that is, it specifically relates to *them*. Further, narcissists aren't much interested in other people's suffering, or, for that matter, any of other people's feelings. But there is hope for the narcissist: New research shows that narcissists can be made to feel empathy if given a nudge in the right direction. In a study, narcissists watched a 10-minute video of a woman -- identified as Melinda -- describing her experience as a victim of domestic violence. Sometimes, beforehand, they were instructed to empathize

with the following instruction: *"Imagine how Melinda feels. Try to take her perspective in the video, imagine how she is feeling about what is happening ..."* When the narcissists were specifically told to imagine how the victim felt, their empathy suddenly kicked in. In comparison, those low on narcissism didn't need to be told, so instructing them to take the victim's perspective had no additional effect. Researcher Dr. Erica G. Hepper thinks this simple technique of reminding narcissists to take another person's point of view can be useful. *"If we encourage narcissists to consider the situation from their teammate or friend's point of view, they are likely to respond in a much more considerate or sympathetic way,"* Dr. Hepper said.

Rav Yitzchak Meir of Gur observed that the greatest darkness exists -- like during the Egyptian plague of darkness -- when we can't see each other, when we can't appreciate the other's pain. *"..... there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days: They saw not one another, neither did they rise anyone from his place..." (Exodus 10:22-23)* Buffered by this insensitivity, we won't get up from our place, we won't lift a hand to help. Ethics of the Fathers says, *Nosay b'ol im chaveiro (6:6) "Carry your friend's burden."* Be aware of and share the pain of others.

Quote of the Week

We are all travelers in the wilderness of this world and the best we can find in our travels is an honest friend. -- **Robert Louis Stevenson**

Joke of the Week

Yankel asked for two bagels.

That'll be forty cents, please," said the baker.

"Forty cents!" exclaimed Yankel. "Why, that's twenty cents a bagel! The man across the street only charges 12 cents."

"So, buy them across the street," shrugged the baker.

"But they're all out of bagels across the street," said Yankel.

"Mister, when I'm all out of bagels, I only charge a nickel apiece."