

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Sam Grossman is an 83-year-old hotelier and property development entrepreneur who cuts a mean zigzag on a downhill ski slope. Despite his advancement into his ninth decade, Sam has spent the past 60 years seemingly ignorant of the concept of aging, keeping himself busy windsurfing, skiing, kayaking, biking, hiking, and generally having the time of his life. A published author who has studied nutrition and longevity since before they were medical buzzwords (his book, 'Win the Food Fight,' was a best-seller), Grossman says he practices what he preaches. The results are hard to argue with. One of Sam's tips for healthy living is not only to stay physically and mentally active, but to regularly endeavor to try something new. "Nothing," Sam says, "will make you feel younger than being a beginner at something again."

The Torah says, "And it shall come to pass, if you shall give heed diligently to the voice of the L-rd your G-d, to observe and to do all His commandments which I command you **this** day, that the L-rd your G-d will set you on high above all nations of the earth." (Deuteronomy 28:1) What does it mean to keep the commandments G-d commands us "this day?" At this point in the Torah's narrative nearly 40 years have passed since the commandments were first given. The emphasis on "today" means that on each day the commandments should be new in your eyes, AS IF you were commanded that day.

Trying something new requires courage -- but is well worth the effort. Entire careers have emerged from people dipping their foot into a pond and suddenly discovering a love for something they had no idea would capture their imagination. The experience of eating a new type of food, listening to a new genre of music, or engaging in a new area of learning or physical activity can be expansive. Additionally, looking at something 'old' in a 'new' way can be exhilarating and transforming. View each day as a new page in your life. Begin again now by becoming a beginner.

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

It has been said that "The past is history; the future is a mystery; all we have is the gift of today, which is why we call it 'the present' ". However, one of the mind's great talents is to imagine events that haven't yet happened. Looking to the future, our imagination helps us plan everything from a vacation to building our homes and cities. But in looking to the past, our ability to consider alternative realities seems less helpful. What use is it to imagine how things *could* have been? A recent study by Kray et. al. (2010) demonstrates a role for thinking about what might have been: Helping to make more sense of our lives. In the first of four studies researchers had students think about the sequence of events that had led them to attend that particular college. Half the participants then wrote about all the things that could have gone differently. Finally, everyone completed measures of meaning and significance of events in their lives. The results showed that those who had considered alternate possibilities (counter-factuals) -- how their lives might have been different -- gave higher ratings to the significance of their choices to attend that particular college and to how meaningful this was in their lives. Psychologically, then, thinking about

how life could have been different made people feel that what did actually happen was more special in comparison.

What are the dynamics of counter-factual thinking? When we think about the true chain of events in our lives, we tend to notice the upside of what seemed to be negative events (things like, "If I wouldn't have missed the plane, I wouldn't have met my wife"). Additionally, thinking about what might have been helps to realize that G-d is running this world. This is because counter-factuals make us more aware of all the other things that could have happened. Often what appears as 'bad' or 'negative' ends up being a blessing. A Hebrew expression, *gam zu l'tova* means 'this too is for the best.' When things don't seem to be going your way, say *gam zu l'tova*. At times, hidden blessings turn out to be the sweetest blessings of all.

Quote of the Week

If I were to say, "God, why me?" about the bad things, then I should have said, "God, why me?" about the good things that happened in my life.-- *Arthur Ashe*

Joke of the Week

There was a knock on the door this past week.

I opened it to find a young, well-dressed man standing there who said: "Hello sir, I'm a Missionary, and I'm here to help you see the light."

So I said "Come in and sit down."

I offered him a fresh cup of coffee and asked "What do you want to talk about?"

He said, "Beats me. Nobody ever let me in before!" (thanks to Alan Haber)