

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Pekudei February 28, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

How do Y'all, Youse, and You All, talk? What does the way you speak say about where you're from? A fascinating series of maps depicting regional variation in American dialects was recently published by Joshua Katz, a graduate student in statistics at NC State University. The maps are based on responses from more than 10,000 Americans on questions like: "What do you call the insect that flies around in the summer and has a rear section that glows in the dark?"

Across the United States, most respondents answered that they use the terms "lightning bug" and "firefly" interchangeably. A substantial number of people use only "firefly" or "lightning bug." However, the unusual term "peenie wallie" is used by 0.02 percent of Americans to describe the small luminescent beetle. Do you call the end of a loaf of bread the heel, crust, or end? Do you pronounce the first syllable of *lawyer* to rhyme with *boy* or to rhyme with *flaw*? Do you call a sweet carbonated beverage *soda*, *pop*, *coke*, *soft drink*, *fizzy drink* ...or something else?

Our choice of words tells others where we're from -- and how we value others. Words are powerful vehicles for many acts of kindness. But words can also cause much pain. Choose your words carefully; your power of words can have a profound effect on the lives of many people.

Parshas Pekudei Exodus 38:21 -- 40:38

This week we read the final portion of Exodus, a book which began with the Jewish people enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt and now ends with the completion of the construction of the Mishkan in the desert. Exodus is known as 'the Book of Redemption'; redemption was achieved not only through our escape from slavery, but also through receiving the Torah on Mt. Sinai which gave purpose to that freedom. The climax of that salvation was when G-d rested His presence amongst the Jewish nation when the Mishkan was completed.

Parshas Pekudei begins with a complete accounting of the gold, silver and copper contributed by the people for use in the Mishkan. Following Moses' inspection and approval of the many utensils and unassembled parts, Moses sets up the Mishkan on Rosh Chodesh Nissan as each part is anointed and arranged in its proper location. When the Mishkan is finally complete with every vessel in place, a cloud descends upon it, indicating that G-d's glory was resting there. Whenever the cloud moved away from the Mishkan, the Jewish people would follow it. At night the cloud was replaced by a pillar of fire.

Rabbinic Ruminations

In Jewish tradition a *golem* is most widely known as an artificial creature created by mystical powers, often to serve its creator. The most well-known story of the golem is connected to Rabbi Judah Loew, the Maharal of Prague (1513-1609). It was said that he created a golem out of clay to protect the Jewish community from a blood libel. However, the golem ran amok and threatened innocent lives, so the Maharal removed the Divine Name, rendering the golem lifeless.

The *Golem effect*, named in 1982, is a psychological phenomenon in which lower expectations placed upon individuals either by supervisors or the individual themselves lead to poorer performance by the individual. A corollary of the *Golem effect* is the *Pygmalion effect*, whereby the greater the expectation placed upon people, the better they perform. The *Golem effect* and the *Pygmalion effect* are forms of self-fulfilling prophecy. People will take the belief they have of themselves (negative or positive) and attribute traits of the belief with themselves and their work.

A recent study of patients undergoing heart transplants underscores how impactful positive images of the future can be. A patient's positive expectations before surgery predicted better health and quality of life after surgery. Echoing the power of expectations to shape outcome, a student in an educational study

said, "When people say you're dumb, you feel dumb, you act dumb. But when you're on top and you're told you can do no wrong, you can't. You have the classroom in the palm of your hand, and you go." Ultimate success depends upon G-d's blessings. With that said, a person's expectations, both optimistic and pessimistic, can play a role in the outcome of an experience. The catastrophic failure of the spies sent to scout out the land of Canaan is partially attributed to their 'Grasshopper Complex'; "*... we were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so we were in their eyes.*" (Numbers 13:33). But if you see yourself as talented, capable and important, your self-concept will open up powers and talents that would have otherwise remained dormant.

Quote of the Week

Smile every chance you get. Not because life has been easy, perfect, or exactly as you had anticipated, but because you choose to be happy and grateful for all the good things you do have and all the problems you know you don't have. -- *Author Unknown*

Joke of the Week

A man left his cat with his brother while he went on vacation for a week. When he came back, he called his brother to see when he could pick the cat up. The brother hesitated, then said, "I'm so sorry, but while you were away, the cat died."

The man was very upset and yelled, "You know, you could have broken the news to me better than that. When I called today, you could have said he was on the roof and wouldn't come down. Then when I called the next day, you could have said that he had fallen off and the vet was working on patching him up. Then when I called the third day, you could have said he had passed away."

The brother thought about it and apologized.

"So tell me. How's Uncle Joe doing?" asked the man.

"He's on the roof and won't come down."