

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Ki Sisa March 7, 2015

“Cheap Thrills: An Ivory Gull Visits Missouri”

This past January, Jason Mullins of Quincy, Illinois, spotted an unusual gull perched on a patch of ice in the Mississippi River. To his amazement, he confirmed that it was an Ivory Gull from the high arctic regions of the world. The gull crossed over to the Missouri side of the river, resting on the barges tied there -- making it the first recorded Missouri sighting of an ivory gull. "This is an exceedingly rare bird to spot this far south," said Knox College biology professor Jim Mountjoy. "Anywhere in the continental United States, it's pretty hard to see. Even if you go to Alaska, it's sometimes quite difficult." People who've seen an Ivory Gull say its fine-textured feathers are so snowy white they appear to glow. The Ivory Gull only rarely comes south of the Bering Sea or the Maritime Provinces. In fact, it rarely is found away from pack ice, spending the winter on the ice north of Newfoundland. And its claws are extra-long for gripping pack ice in its native Arctic habitat. (<http://www.arkive.org/ivory-gull/pagophila-eburnea/>)

Word of the rare visitor quickly spread among bird enthusiasts, and soon birders from all over the Midwest descended upon Quincy to get a glimpse of the bird. When Kansas resident and president of the Kansas Ornithological Society, Matt Gearheart heard about the “uber-rare event” through a birding email group, he and a flock of fellow bird fanatics piled into a car at 4:30 a.m. They drove across Missouri in ice, snow and bitter cold to get a gander of the gull. The crew headed for a spot where the bird has been sighted. Dozens of other birders huddled in cars with binoculars, others shivered on a bridge in the blustery 10-degree cold with spotting scopes on tripods. During the bird's Illinois/Missouri visit, over 100 reports of the bird were posted on eBird.org, an online, real-time bird listing website. Jason Mullins, first to spot the Ivory Gull, considers himself very lucky to be able to see such a magnificent creature. "It's the bird of a lifetime," Jason said. "It really is."

Rav Shlomo Wolbe said. "Every individual, like Adam, is an entire world. The existence of billions of people does not detract from each person's uniqueness. Every individual is a one-time phenomenon." Rav Wolbe writes that one should be aware that . . . "I, with my strengths and talents, facial features and personality traits, am unique in the world. Among all those living today and in all past generations, there was no one like me, nor will there ever be anyone like me to the end of time. Hashem has sent me into the world with a unique mission that no one else can fulfill, only I in my one-time existence." Appreciate that you're a rare bird. You are even more rare than an arctic Ivory Gull.

Parshas Ki Sisa Exodus 30:11 -- 34:35

The portion begins with G-d's command to Moses to take a census by collecting an equal contribution of a half-shekel coin from every adult male between the ages of 20 and 60, with the profits going to the Mishkan (Tabernacle). G-d designates Betzalel, of the tribe of Judah, and Oholiav, of the tribe of Dan, to supervise the upcoming construction of the Mishkan. The mitzvah of Shabbat is then repeated to caution the nation that even the construction of the Mishkan does not supersede the observance of the weekly day of rest.

The Torah returns to the narrative of the Revelation at Mt. Sinai and describes the horrible sin of the golden calf. G-d relents to Moses' prayer that the Children of Israel should be spared from annihilation for this great transgression, and Moses descends from the mountain with the two tablets of the Ten Commandments in hand. Upon witnessing a small segment of the population dancing around the golden calf, Moses smashes the tablets and burns the idol, initiating the process of repentance. Moses again ascends the mountain to pray to G-d that the Jewish people should be forgiven and regain their status as the chosen people. Moses eventually returns with the second set of tablets and a renewed covenant with G-d, his face radiant as a result of the Divine experience.

No Rabbinic Ruminations in this edition of BTG.

Quote of the Week

Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others . . . he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance. -- **Robert Kennedy (1925-1968)**

Joke of the Week

The local sheriff was looking for a deputy, and one of the applicants - who was not known to be particularly bright, was called in for an interview. "Okay," began the sheriff, "What is 1 and 1?" "Eleven," came the reply. The sheriff thought to himself, "That's not what I meant, but he's right."

Then the sheriff asked, "What two days of the week start with the letter 'T'?" "Today & tomorrow" replied the applicant. The sheriff was again surprised over the answer, one that he had never thought of himself.

"Now, listen carefully, who killed Abraham Lincoln?", asked the sheriff. The job seeker seemed a little surprised, then thought really hard for a minute and finally admitted, "I don't know." The sheriff replied, "Well, why don't you go home and work on that one for a while?"

The applicant left and wandered over to his pals who were waiting to hear the results of the interview. He greeted them with a cheery smile and said, "The job is mine! The interview went great! First day on the job and I'm already working on a murder case!"