

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Kerry Drake's mother was dying. Then, on a morning this past January his brother called him to say her time had come. So he booked the earliest flight possible from his home in San Francisco to Lubbock, Texas via Houston. When Kerry got on the plane and became aware that his flight was delayed leaving San Francisco, he became visibly distraught. The delay risked his chances of making his connecting flight to Lubbock that was scheduled to leave 40 minutes after he landed in Texas. "I knew this itinerary was a risk because the stopover in Houston was (brief), and my connecting flight was the last flight to Lubbock that day," he said. "I knew that everything had to go right for me to make it home to say goodbye to my mom."

A flight attendant on his United Airlines flight tried to comfort him. "She said she would do everything she could and brought extra napkins for my tears," Kerry said. Another flight attendant asked Kerry for his flight number and relayed it to the captain. By the time Kerry's plane landed in Houston, his connecting flight had left the gate. At least that's what he thought. "As I was running up to the gate, the agent saw me coming and shouted, 'Mr. Drake? We've been expecting you'," he said. "She waved me onto the plane without looking at my boarding pass." United had held the aircraft for him. The grateful son said, "Had I missed my flight to Lubbock, I would not have been able to tell my mom goodbye. When she died, I realized I was wiping away my tears with the extra United napkins." Kerry Drake was able to join his father at his mother's bedside to witness her last hours.

The kindness shown to Kerry Drake was beyond the call of duty. The word *chasid* comes from the root *chesed*, which means giving and kindness beyond that which is required. This is in contrast to the word *tzadik*, from the root *tzedek*, which means "right." A *tzadik* does strictly and conscientiously what is required. A *chasid* goes "beyond the call of duty" doing MORE than is required. One who acts with exceptional kindness shows their love and appreciation for the mitzvah of kindness.

Parshas Bamidbar Numbers 1:1 - 4:20

This week we begin reading Sefer Bamidbar -- known in English as 'The Book of Numbers'. Bamidbar ('in the desert') begins with G-d telling Moses to take a census of all men over the age of 20. If you like names and numbers, you'll love this week's portion. The count reveals just over 600,000, excluding the Levites who weren't included in the census. We also find described the manner in which the Jewish People camped around the Mishkan (Tabernacle), and the order in which they traveled during the 40 years in the desert. The Jewish People were arranged in four sections around the Mishkan; east, south, west and north.

The Levites are singled out for special responsibilities. A formal transfer is made between the first-born and the Levites, whereby the Levites take over the role the first-born would have served. The sons of Levi are divided into three main families; Gershon, Kehas and Merari. Each is given a special task in transporting the Mishkan.

Shavuos

The major festival of Shavuos begins on Tuesday evening May 14 and concludes Thursday evening, May 16. You may remember Cecil B. DeMille's film 'The Ten Commandments', starring Charlton Heston. Good film; however, the book was better than the movie! On Wednesday morning the Torah reading (Exodus 19:1 - 20:23) contains the narrative of giving of the Torah and the *Aseres HaDibros* -- inaccurately translated as 'The Ten Commandments.' On the second day of Shavuos, Thursday, the Torah reading (Deut.14:22 - 16:17) contains a brief description of the Shalosh Regalim - Passover, Shavuos and Succos.

An argument can be made that Shavuos is THE most important holiday of the Jewish year. After all, without the Torah, what is Judaism? The Torah was given to all of the Jewish people. Unlike DeMille's version where only Charlton . . . I mean, Moses heard G-d speak, the uniqueness of *Matan Torah* (Revelation) is that every man, woman and child heard G-d speak at Sinai. This fact alone distinguishes Judaism from all other religions and faiths. When the Torah was given, it was to the entirety of the Jewish people.

Rabbinic Ruminations

We regularly encounter stressful situations and challenges. Research suggests that thinking about what's important to you can improve your ability to withstand stress and enhance your problem-solving powers. In a new study, Cresswell et. al. (2013) tested whether a simple self-affirmation exercise would have a beneficial effect on problem-solving under stress, particularly for individuals who have recently been stressed. The self-affirmation exercise involved writing a paragraph on why the things that matter to us most (G-d, family, friends, a favorite activity) are so important.

In Cresswell's experiment, half the participants did the self-affirmation exercise while the rest performed a similar, but ineffectual exercise. The results showed that those who had been stressed recently *and* were self-affirmed before they began the exercise performed better at the problem-solving task. This suggests the self-affirmation exercise could be useful for people under stress who are, for example, taking exams, going to job interviews or under pressure at work. What's fascinating about the self-affirmation task is that it doesn't have to be related to the area in which you're looking to improve. So thinking about the importance of your family can increase your problem-solving performance, even though the two have little in common.

Today's positivist trend is predated by the 3,300 year old Torah doctrine known as *bitachon*, or trust in G-d. The Chassidic master Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789–1866) distilled this as the Yiddish adage, *Tracht gut, vet zein gut*—"Think good, and it will be good." What this means, says the former Lubavitcher Rebbe, is that *bitachon*, the absolute assurance and conviction that G-d will make things good, actually becomes the conduit and vessel which draws down and enables us to receive G-d's blessings. Positive thinking brings about positive results.

Quote of the Week

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself -- *Leo Tolstoy*

Joke of the Week

A man takes his Rottweiler to the vet. "My dog's cross-eyed. Is there anything you can do for him?"

"Well," says the vet, "let's have a look at him" So he picks the dog up and examines his eyes, then checks his teeth.

Finally, he says "I'm going to have to put him down."

"What? Because he's cross-eyed?"

"No, because he's really heavy"