

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Toldos November 22, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates ~

This past Thursday, hordes of strangers in China rushed to save a woman trapped under the wheels of a 1.5 ton car. Dramatic video footage (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QmWmxW-Hs>) shows a couple on a scooter riding along a city street when suddenly they are hit by a vehicle. The husband is thrown off the scooter, while his wife is caught and pulled under what appears to be an Opel Astra Estate.

The husband, along with a police officer, who happened to be nearby, quickly band together to try to lift the car. Within seconds, passers-by are seen running to her aid, heaving the vehicle off the ground. Through the efforts of about twenty people, the car is raised high enough so the trapped woman can finally be pulled to safety. Last reports by local media were that the woman was recovering at her local hospital, no doubt due to the quick action of many selfless onlookers.

What can inspire ordinary people to do something extraordinary for their fellow man? G-d created humans in such a way that on occasion, each of us needs help from those around us. This understanding leads to the dual realization that: a) Each of us is incomplete on our own and b) We each complete each other with our own expertise, talents and skills. Whether it be small gestures of kindness or heroic life-saving acts, "*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!*" (Psalm 133:1)

Parshas Toldos Genesis 25:19 -- 28:9

Isaac and Rebecca pray to G-d for a child. Rebecca finally conceives, and after a difficult pregnancy she gives birth to twins -- Esau and Jacob. Their personality differences soon grow apparent, as Esau turns to hunting while Jacob is pure and wholesome, spending his time studying Torah. Returning from a hunting expedition, Esau finds Jacob cooking a pot of lentil soup. Jacob agrees to give his older brother a portion from the pot of soup in exchange for the spiritual birthright. Faced with a severe famine, Isaac and family settle in Gerar (the land of the Philistines within Israel's borders) rather than descend to Egypt as his father Abraham had done years before. After experiencing astonishing financial success, Isaac comes into continual conflict with King Avimelech over the wells which Isaac dug anew. This pattern of 'success and persecution' has repeated itself throughout Jewish history. Isaac decides to bless Esau as the firstborn. At Rebecca's insistence, Jacob disguises himself as his older brother and receives the blessing of the firstborn (which rightfully belonged to him). The Torah portion concludes with Jacob fleeing from Esau's wrath for 'stealing' his blessing and escaping to Charan to stay with his uncle, Laban, where he is to find a wife.

Rabbinic Ruminations

It has been said that "speech is silver, silence is golden." There are occasions, however, when silence is anything but golden. Brooding, pouting, refusing to make eye contact or communicate are characteristic reactions of those who prefer to suffer in silence. Whether you're on the giving or the receiving end of the *silent treatment*, shutting down in response to conflict is hurtful and bad for your relationships. Common sense tells us that the silent treatment doesn't productively resolve an issue -- and a recent study underscores how toxic the silent treatment can be.

In a study that included 14,000 participants, researchers found that engaging in a "demand-withdrawal" pattern is a bad sign. When one partner puts pressure on the other with requests or complaints and the other responds with avoidance or silence, this type of communication takes an emotional and physical toll. Not surprisingly, these couples experience less intimacy, poorer communication and have lower relationship satisfaction. "Partners get locked in this pattern, largely because they each see the other as the cause," says study author Paul Schrodtt, Ph.D., professor at Texas Christian University. "Both partners see the other as the problem. It's the most common pattern of conflict in marriage or any committed, established romantic relationship. And it does tremendous damage." Although this study was

based on romantic relationships, it is best to avoid the silent treatment in all our relationships -- with friends, with family and at work. It's passive-aggressive, harmful and unnecessary. Worst of all, it undermines an opportunity to communicate effectively, strengthen your connection and build trust. One tip to manage the silent treatment conflict is to be cognizant of the G-d/mankind relationship paradigm. G-d, despite his status of perfection, judges us with kindness, compassion and understanding. Shifting our perspective from an emphasis on seeking perfection in others to one of accepting the flaws and fallibilities of those we love and care about will reduce the frequency and intensity of demand-withdrawal interactions.

Quote of the Week

Men and nations behave wisely once they have exhausted all the other alternatives.

- *Abba Eban (1915-2002)*

Joke of the Week

An American tourist was riding in a taxi in Israel.

As the taxi approached a red light, the tourist was shocked to see the driver drive straight through without even slowing down. Surprised as he was, he didn't say anything, feeling himself a 'guest' and not wanting to make waves.

The trip continued without event until the next intersection.

This time the light was green and, to the American's dismay, the cab driver brought the vehicle to a grinding halt.

Unable to contain his astonishment, he turns to the driver. "Listen", he says, "When you went through the red light, I didn't say anything. But why on earth are you stopping at a green light?" The Israeli driver looks at the American as if he was deranged. "Are you crazy?!" he shouts. "The other guy has a red light! Do you want to get us killed?!"