

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Mikeitz ~ Shabbos Chanukah November 30, 2013

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

By now you've heard of *Thanksgivukah* -- the term coined to mark this year's rare confluence of Chanukah and Thanksgiving (personally, I prefer *Thanks-a-latke*). *Thanksgivukah* has spawned a Facebook page — with more than 12,000 likes and counting — T-shirts, aprons, *thanksgivukah* notepads, recipes and more. 9-year-old Asher Weintraub of Brooklyn, N.Y., invented a “menurky,” a turkey-shaped menorah — or Chanukah candelabra — and has sold more than 1,500 of them. The convergence of the two holidays is a rare happening. It last occurred in 1888, and after Thursday, won't happen again for 70,000-plus years. This year, Nov. 28 is Thanksgiving and the first full day of the eight-day Festival of Lights, which begins at sundown the previous night.

But turkey-flavored latkes or not, what is an essential lesson we should take from Chanukah? Rabbi Dr. A. Twerski (in *Living Each Day*) raises an interesting question: Why not light all 8 candles every night of the holiday, rather than one the first night, two the second, and so on? The order of the lighting of the Chanukah candles, Rabbi Twerski says, teaches us two ideas.

First, we should always seek to increase our enlightenment and not be stagnant. We should never be satisfied with whatever spiritual growth we have achieved, but should constantly seek to further our growth. Secondly, it's a mistake to grasp too much too fast. Spiritual growth should be gradual, and we should adapt ourselves to each new level and integrate what we've achieved before going on to the next step. Eight lights the first night would be too much and too soon, and each night thereafter would show no increase in light.

Parshas Mikeitz Genesis 41:1 -- 44:17

Pharaoh has a two-part dream about seven scrawny cows devouring seven robust cows, followed by seven thin stalks of grain swallowing seven healthy, good ones. When his advisers are unable to adequately interpret the dream, Pharaoh summons Joseph, who had been in prison for a total of twelve years. Ascribing his power of interpretation solely to G-d, Joseph tells Pharaoh that Egypt will first experience seven years of abundant crops, and then will be ravaged by a devastating famine. Pharaoh appoints Joseph as viceroy of Egypt, making him the second most powerful man in the land (this is a source for the sport of tennis in the Torah -- we see that Joseph ... served in Pharaoh's court). Joseph's wife Asnat gives birth to two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, and the years of plenty and famine unfold just as Joseph had predicted.

With the famine devastating the land of Canaan (Israel), Joseph's brothers descend to Egypt to purchase food. When they don't recognize their royal brother, Joseph sets in motion a plan to determine if the brothers have fully repented for their sin of selling him almost twenty-two years before. Joseph acts detached, accusing them of being spies, and holds Simeon hostage. Joseph then allows the rest of the brothers to go with food to their father on the condition that they return with their youngest brother Benjamin. With great reluctance, Jacob agrees to this condition. Mikeitz concludes with the looming threat that Benjamin will be made a slave to the Egyptian ruler.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Groucho Marx once said, "I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member." Groucho's humorous statement notwithstanding, most people derive satisfaction from being part of a group. A new study reports that when social relationships provide an all important sense of belonging, people feel life has more meaning ([Lambert et al., 2013](#)).

The effect was revealed in one experiment in which participants were asked to close their eyes and think of two people or groups to which they really belonged. Then they were asked about how much meaning they felt life had. This group was compared with two others where participants thought about the value

of other people -- but not of any group they belonged to. Participants who had been thinking about the groups they belonged to felt the highest levels of meaning in life. Just the reverse effect has been shown in previous studies. People who feel excluded from social groups tend to feel that life has less meaning. One of our missions in life -- whether we realize it or not -- is to find meaning. One reason that belonging increases meaning in life is that it promotes the idea of continuity and of permanence. If you belong to an organization or group that is greater than yourself, there is comfort in the idea that it will outlast you. There is an interesting and growing body of medical research that has discovered the positive health effects of religion, particularly association with a religious community where sharing, generosity and happiness are the order of the day. Many generations before, Hillel stated the importance of being part of a group: "*Al tifrosh min ha'tzibur* -- Don't separate yourself from the community." (Ethics of the Fathers 2:5) We gain great strength by standing together with others.

Quote of the Week

Don't only practice your art, but force your way into its secrets, for it and knowledge can raise men to the the Divine -- *Ludwig van Beethoven*

Joke of the Week

A businessman and senior citizen are sitting next to each other on a long flight. The businessman thinks that seniors are dumb and can easily be fooled. So the businessman asks the senior if he would like to play a fun game.

The senior is tired and just wants to take a nap, so politely declines and tries to catch a few winks.

The businessman persists, saying, "I ask you a question, and if you don't know the answer, you pay me only \$5.00. Then you ask me one, and if I don't know the answer, I will pay you \$500.00," he says. This catches the senior's attention, and to keep the businessman quiet, he agrees to play the game. The businessman asks the first question. "What's the distance from the Earth to the Moon?" The senior doesn't say a word, but reaches into his pocket, pulls out a five-dollar bill, and hands it to the businessman. Now it's the senior's turn. He asks the businessman, "What goes up a hill with three legs, and comes down with four?"

The businessman uses his laptop to search all references he can find on the Internet. He sends e-mails to all the smart friends he knows; all to no avail. After an hour of searching, he finally gives up. He wakes the senior and hands him \$500.00. The senior pockets the \$500.00 and goes right back to sleep. The businessman is going nuts not knowing the answer. He wakes the senior up and asks, "Well, so what goes up a hill with three legs and comes down with four?"

The senior reaches into his pocket, hands the lawyer \$5.00, and goes back to sleep. (Thanks to Howard Rosenberg)