

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason

Parshas Vayeitzei November 9, 2013

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Mitchell Rich, a New York-based consultant, said that without Shabbat he'd have no idea "that I'm completely addicted to my phone." During the week, Mitchell says he's sometimes distracted from family dinners because he's busy responding to emails as they come in, no matter the hour. Dan Rollman, who is Jewish but not strictly observant, recently found himself inspired by religious Jews' commitment to unplug. He joined with a group of friends and vowed to once a week detach from technology, spend time with family and friends and go outside. Their so-called Sabbath Manifesto caught on, sparking a movement of thousands who commit to turn off their devices at least one day per year.

Joe Lieberman kept Shabbat during his decades-long career as a U.S. Senator from Connecticut and on the campaign trail running for vice president. He said the weekly ritual helped him function the other six days he was booked solid with commitments.

"I don't know how I could be a U.S. senator and not observe the Sabbath," Sen. Lieberman said. There were times he had to choose between his job and his observance, he said, and the results were mixed. Because driving is prohibited on Shabbat, he remembers walking the 4.5 miles from his house to the Capitol on several Saturdays to participate in tense votes. But he typically shut himself off from politics on Shabbat, letting those trying to reach him leave a message on his voicemail. "It really creates a sanctuary, which has a great feeling in itself," he said.

The balancing act of life -- how to balance the different values and priorities of Judaism and of life -- is a formidable challenge. Our priorities determine the lifestyle we choose to live. If our true priorities in life are to be a good Jew and to love the Almighty -- and if we remember that life does not equal work -- we'll be on the path to both Jewish and personal fulfillment.

Parshas Vayeitzei Genesis 28:10 -- 32:3

Jacob escapes from his wicked brother Esau and travels to Charan, where he will stay with his uncle Laban. While spending the night at the future site of the Temple, G-d appears to Jacob in a dream. Rich in symbolism and meaning, the dream depicts a ladder extending from heaven to earth upon which angels are ascending and descending. After arriving in Charan, Jacob meets Laban's daughter Rachel and agrees to work for Laban for seven years for her hand in marriage. When the wedding night finally arrives, Laban deceives Jacob by substituting his older daughter Leah in Rachel's place. After waiting a week, Jacob also marries Rachel, but not without being forced to commit to another seven years of labor.

Over the next few years Rachel remains barren, while Leah gives birth to six sons and a daughter. Bilhah and Zilpah (the maidservants of Rachel and Leah respectively) each have two sons with Jacob. Finally Rachel also has a son, Joseph. Jacob becomes very wealthy during his twenty-year stay with Laban, even though his father-in-law continually tries to swindle him. After seeking counsel with his wives, Jacob and his family flee from Laban, who pursues and confronts him, upset that he left without saying goodbye and arrogantly claiming that Jacob stole his idols. Eventually they sign a peace treaty and part ways.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Are you a morning person? Being a 'morning person' commonly refers to one who rises relatively early and doesn't stay up too late. But a new study suggests an additional meaning to the term. In a new study published in *Psychological Science*, a theory of a 'morning morality' effect was examined. Researchers speculated that much of the bad behavior that goes on at night -- wild partying, carousing, etc. -- may be due to people's self-control being sapped by everyday events and, by evening, their mental and moral reserves are worn down.

To check out this theory of morning morality, participants in four studies were given opportunities to cheat while carrying out simple computer-based tasks. Sometimes people were tested in the morning and sometimes in the afternoon. Each time during the tasks, they were surreptitiously given chances to cut corners or tell little fibs. Across the studies, the researchers found that people were less likely to cheat and lie in the morning than the afternoon. People who cheated more in the afternoon also showed lower moral awareness, suggesting their moral character was bleeding away as the day proceeded. Perhaps much of the bad behavior that goes on at night is more than just opportunity, but also a result of the collective erosion of people's moral fibre. The authors of the study (Kouchaki & Smith, 2013) even suggest that the morning morality effect is worth knowing about if you've got some important decisions to make. King Solomon's suggestion? Morning, noon and night, look to the Torah for moral guidance: "For a mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is light." (Proverbs 6:23)

Quote of the Week

If wrinkles must be written upon our brows, let them not be written upon the heart. The spirit should never grow old. -- **John Kenneth Galbraith**

Joke of the Week

George received a parrot as a birthday present. Buzzy the parrot was a great gift, except for two problems: The parrot had a bad attitude and a terrible vocabulary. Every other word was profanity; those that weren't profanity were, to say the least, rude.

George tried to change Buzzy's attitude by constantly saying polite words and playing soft music, anything he could think of. But nothing worked. Finally, in a moment of desperation, George put Buzzy in the freezer to get a minute of peace. For a few moments he heard Buzzy swearing, squawking, kicking and screaming. Then, suddenly, there was absolute quiet. George was frightened that he might have actually hurt the bird and quickly opened the freezer door.

Buzzy calmly stepped out onto George's extended arm. Perfectly calm, Buzzy said, "I am very sorry that I offended you with my language and my actions and I ask your forgiveness. I will endeavor to correct my behavior, and I am sure it will never happen again."

George was astounded at the change in Buzzy's attitude, and said, "Buzzy, I'm amazed at how polite and civil you are. What changed your attitude? What happened when I put you in that freezer?"

Buzzy said, "May I ask what the turkey did?"