

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Noach October 4, 2013

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

In the comic book world, Spider Man, Superboy and Supergirl were teenagers determined to be superheroes. Tadahiro Kanemasu just wants to be a helpful citizen. Nevertheless, wearing a green outfit with silver trim and matching mask, the 27-year-old Tadahiro certainly looks and acts the part of a superhero. He can often be found waiting by the stairs of a Tokyo subway station, lending his strength to the elderly, passengers lugging heavy packages and mothers with baby strollers. A chalkboard reads, "Baby Carriage Carrying Ranger." When he sees people who need a hand, Tadahiro rushes over, saying, "I'll help you carry that!" In true superhero fashion, all services rendered are done free of charge.

Why the superhero outfit? Tadahiro says, "Japanese people find it hard to accept help, they feel obligated to the other person, so the mask really helps me out." Inspiration came from the children Tadahiro met at his job at an organic grocery store, which also prompted the color of his costume. He picked up the green Power Rangers suit and two spares at a discount store for \$41 each. Hayato Ito, who works alongside Tadahiro at the greengrocer, said his kindness to others over the years meant his alter ego did not come as a complete surprise. "There were hints of this from a long time ago but finally he flowered as a hero," Hayato said. Since Tadahiro can set aside only a couple of hours each day for his good deeds, he hopes to recruit others in different colored suits. Already he has inquiries about pink and red.

One need not wear a mask and green outfit to perform acts of kindness. Jewish law and literature offers many suggestions, guidelines and requirements to fulfill our obligation of *chesed* (loving kindness). We must do charity and kindness actively, diligently, constantly and lovingly. This includes being on the lookout for opportunities or creative ways to do *chesed*: Run errands for someone in need, perform random acts of kindness, tutor a student and provide homework help. In the words of King Solomon "Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness finds life, righteousness and honor." (Proverbs 21:21) Feel pleasure in the joy of doing a kind act for another person.

Parshas Noach Genesis 6:9 -- 11:32

As a result of Mankind's evil, G-d brings a flood to destroy every living creature. Only Noah, his family, and at least one pair of every animal species were spared. Trivia question: Do you know the name of Noah's wife? (hint -- it is NOT 'Joan of Ark') When the flood waters begin to recede after a lengthy deluge, Noah sends forth from the ark a raven and dove to determine whether the land has dried sufficiently so that they can leave the ark to once again resettle the earth. G-d promises that He will never again destroy all of Mankind by means of a flood, and He designates the rainbow as a sign for that eternal covenant.

Noah plants a vineyard, drinks from its produce and becomes drunk. In his intoxicated state, he shamefully uncovers himself. While his son Ham dealt with his father inappropriately, Noah's other two sons, Shem and Japheth, cover their father in a respectful manner. Generations pass and the world is repopulated. The people attempt to wage war against G-d by building the Tower of Babel. G-d responds by mixing up their languages into a 'babble', and dispersing them across the planet.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Where we look determines what we find. Using a flashlight analogy, we have a choice about where we want to shine the light and what we want to focus on. Upon entering a dark room, we can shine in in the corners if we are looking for mold or we can shine it on the walls if we are looking for works of art. Where we choose to shine the light *matters*. The impact of this idea can be illustrated from a study of bowlers. In a fascinating research study, Dr. Daniel Kirschenbaum from the University of Wisconsin took a group of bowlers and had them videotaped as they bowled three games. Over the course of the next six

months the entire group was asked to practice bowling. Half of the bowlers practiced through reviewing videotapes of their spares or strikes, whereas the other half of the bowlers were shown videotapes of frames when they did not knock down all the pins. Using the videotapes as sources of feedback for change, statistically significant differences were found between the two groups. Those who watched themselves succeed (i.e., making strikes or spares) showed as much as a 100% improvement in bowling scores compared to those who watched themselves in a non-success condition.

This bowling study demonstrates the potency of the positive. Not surprisingly, Judaism encourages us to choose to see the good in things, and in people. This is called having an *ayin tova*, literally a "good eye." Having an *ayin tova* doesn't mean pretending flaws aren't there; rather, it means making it a habit to think in a realistic positive manner. Focusing on the positive will bring superior results compared to focusing on the negative. Catch someone doing something right! And the questions we ask our colleagues, our kids, our loved ones, and ourselves truly matter; Instead of asking about problems, inquire about possibilities.

Quote of the Week

We are all of us born with a letter inside us, and that only if we are true to ourselves, may we be allowed to read it before we die. -- *Douglas Coupland*

Joke of the Week

A wealthy businessman lay on his deathbed. His rabbi came to visit and talked about the traditional Jewish perspective that one should never give up hope and to always trust in G-d. When the rabbi was done, the businessman said, "Rabbi, if G-d heals me, I'll pay off the shul's mortgage, and make an additional gift of a million dollars."

Miraculously, the businessman got better and within a few short weeks was out of the hospital.

About a month later, the rabbi approached this businessman in shul and said, "You know, when you were in the hospital dying, you promised to give the synagogue a million dollars if you got well. We haven't received it as of yet."

The businessman replied, "Did I say that? I guess that goes to show how sick I really was!"