

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason Parshas Nitzavim September 12, 2015

Dear friends and readers of Beyond Twelve Gates: As the year 5775 comes to a close, I'd like to wish you and your family a Shana Tova U'm'tuka -- a Good, Sweet New Year. May we all be written and inscribed in the Book of Life. Beyond Twelve Gates will resume after the holidays.

Rabbi Ze'ev Smason

Beyond Twelve Gates ~ "Little-Green-Leaved Friends to the Rescue!"

Parshas Nitzavim Deuteronomy 29:9 - 30:20

Nitzavim begins with Moses gathering every member of the Jewish people for the final time. He initiates them into a Covenant with G-d as the Almighty's 'Chosen People'. This Covenant applied not only to those present on that day, but to all future Jewish generations. Moses tells the people that although eventually they will sin, in time they will repent and return to the Torah, and G-d will usher in the messianic era when we all return to the land of Israel. Furthermore, he assures them that the commandments are neither distant nor inaccessible ('it is not in heaven'). This means that a committed Jewish life is well within everyone's reach.

Torah Reading for Rosh Hashana

The two days of Rosh Hashana fall out on Monday, September 14 and Tuesday, September 15 (The first day of Rosh Hashana begins Sunday evening). On Monday the Torah reading is from Genesis 21:1 -- 21:34. On Tuesday the Torah reading is from Genesis 22:1 -- 22:24.

The theme of the Monday Torah reading is that G-d remembered Sarah at the age of 90. She bore a son named Isaac to her 100 year-old husband Abraham. Our tradition teaches that Sarah conceived on Rosh Hashana. Not only do we recall Sarah and Abraham's great merit, but we should be inspired to repent and pray just as they did.

The theme of the Tuesday Torah reading is the account of the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac. Both Abraham and Isaac demonstrated their willingness to make any sacrifice to comply with G-d's will. Our tradition teaches that the Akeida took place on Rosh Hashana. The shofar of Rosh Hashana is customarily made of a ram's horn to recall the merit of the Akeida because a ram was substituted for Isaac on the altar

Rabbinical Ruminations

Monet said, *"I must have flowers, always, and always."* The benefits that plants and flowers confer should make us consider them a necessity rather than an object of décor. If you need convincing, here are some ways that bringing plants inside helps us out.

Better health: Bringing flowers or a plant while visiting a hospital patient may be verging on cliché, but so effective are plants in helping surgery patients recover that one [study](#) recommends them as a "noninvasive, inexpensive, and effective complementary medicine for surgical patients." The study, conducted at Kansas State University, found that viewing plants during recovery from surgery led to a significant improvement in physiologic responses as evidenced by lower systolic blood pressure, and lower ratings of pain, anxiety, and fatigue as compared to patients without plants in their rooms.

Cleaner air: NASA has spent a lot of time researching air quality in sealed environments, which makes sense. [Extensive research](#) by the space agency discovered a then-new concept in indoor air quality improvement in which plants play a pivotal role: "Both plant leaves and roots are utilized in removing trace levels of toxic vapors from inside tightly sealed buildings." When talking about the relationship between plants and space travelers, NASA notes that plants, "provide nourishment for the body when eaten as food, and they improve the quality of indoor air. Plants take the carbon dioxide from air to produce oxygen that humans can breathe."

Sales Soaring: Plants not only have a positive effect on mood, productivity and sleep, but also upon perception and value. The Opryland Hotel in Nashville has an 85 percent occupancy rate — a high number by hotel standards where the average is 64 percent. According to a case study, the main factor accounting for this high occupancy rate is the large investment in flowers and plants.

The Midrash asks how a person can cling to the Infinite -- at least allegorically. It answers: Just as G-d created the world and then planted trees in it (*Gen. 2:8: The Lord G-d planted a garden in Eden*), He instructed the Jewish people that when they enter the land of Israel, they should do the same (*Lev. 19:23: "When you enter the land, you shall plant all types of fruit trees."*) As John Muir said, "The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness." Appreciate and enjoy your big and little green-leaved friends.

Quote of the Week

Man suffers most from the suffering he fears, but never appears, therefore he suffers more than G-d meant him to suffer. -- *Dutch proverb*

Joke of the Week

Abraham bought himself a fancy new computer. He was showing it to Isaac one day. "Look at all the wonderful programs it has on it. And look at all the neat things it can do..."

Isaac was impressed, but a little concerned..."But dad, I don't think your computer has enough memory."

Abraham said "Don't worry son; G-d will provide the RAM."