

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Few people keep Queen Elizabeth II waiting, especially when she has issued a personal invitation, but President Ronald Reagan managed to do so. It happened in 1982, when the Reagan White House failed to reply in a timely way to a personal invitation from the queen for the president and his wife Nancy to stay with her at Windsor Castle during a planned visit to England. There were raised eyebrows and bruised feelings when President Reagan did not answer the sort of invite that usually commands a prompt reply the world over. The queen's invitation was left to languish for weeks -- something the British believe is simply Not Done. The gaffe was apparently the result of a lack of organization and experience from those surrounding the newly-elected American president. The misunderstanding was eventually cleared up, and President Reagan even found the time to go horseback riding with the queen. Are you a reliable person? Reliability is synonymous with faithfulness. Old Faithful erupts more frequently than any of the other big geysers in Yellowstone National Park. It was named for its consistent performance by members of the Washburn Expedition in 1870. Although its average interval has lengthened through the years (due to earthquakes and vandalism), Old Faithful is still as spectacular and predictable as it was a century ago. G-d praised Moses for being reliable: "*B'chol bayti ne'eman hu*," "In all of My Palace, he (Moses) is **faithful**" (Numbers 12:7) The blessing given to Jewish newlyweds is that they build a "*Bayit ne'eman b'Yisrael*," a home **faithful** to the traditions of Israel. Are you a reliable person?

Parshas Mishpatim Exodus 21:1 -- 24:18

Following on the heels of the Ten Commandments, this week's Torah portion deals primarily with civil law. Like the realm of the ceremonial, our worldly and common activities must be infused with holiness and observed carefully. Included among the civil laws discussed in the portion are; penalties for causing bodily injury to another person and damaging his property; laws regarding borrowers; the mitzvah to show sensitivity to the poor and to offer them free loans; and laws relating to the honest dispensation of justice. After mentioning the mitzvos of Shabbos and *Shemittah* (the Sabbatical year), the portion continues with a brief discussion of the three pilgrimage festivals -- Passover, Shevuous and Sukkos.

The Torah then returns to the revelation at Mt. Sinai. The Jewish people declare their commitment to do whatever G-d commands with the famous phrase "Everything G-d has said, we will do and we will listen." The portion concludes with Moses' ascending the mountain, where he will remain for forty days and forty nights to receive the rest of the Torah.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Meet the tardigrade, also known as the water bear, the world's toughest animal. Normally, the tiny tardigrade waddles around on its 4 pairs of plump little legs sucking the juices out of mosses and lichen. These microscopic, translucent animals, about the size of the period at the end of this sentence, occur almost everywhere on earth. They can be found from the Himalayas (above 22,000 ft) to the deep sea (below 13,000 ft), and from the polar regions to the equator. Since 2007, tardigrades have also returned alive from studies in which they have been exposed to the vacuum of space for a few days in low Earth orbit. Water bears are the first known animal to survive in space.

When the going gets tough, the cute and squishy water bear is tougher than a grizzly bear. The tardigrade is the most extreme survivor on the planet, because when conditions are fierce, this animal effectively curls up and dies. It loses 99% of the water in its body and enters a state of suspended animation, called cryptobiosis. Let's say a tardigrade starts getting too cold. It will shrink down, retract all its legs, and shut down all its systems until conditions improve. Once they're in this state, they are practically indestructible. Water bears can survive temperatures as low as -328F. Extreme heat is no problem, either; tardigrades have survived a scorching 303 degrees. They can survive solar radiation, gamma radiation, ionic radiation -- hundreds of times higher doses than would kill a person. People are sometimes like the cryptobiotic tardigrade. The water bear can go without food or water for nearly 10 years, almost completely drying until they rehydrate, and withdraw in its spiny shell without water, oxygen or heat. But when moistened, it immediately springs back to life, the legs and head poking out from its coffin-like shell. People's lives can become dull, flat, and deathlike. Like the tardigrade, some individuals have a tendency to withdraw due to life's difficulties and simply exist. Their very life

itself can be refreshed when moistened with a kind word, a warm smile, or an act of kindness. *Chesed*, an act of loving kindness, is a great mitzvah -- and like water to a tardigrade, can bring a person back to life.

Quote of the Week

It is a formidable struggle for some people to see what is in front of their eyes. -- *George Orwell*

Joke of the Week

A man had been driving all night and by morning was still far from his destination. He decided to stop at the next city and find somewhere quiet to park his car and get an hour or two of sleep. As luck would have it, the quiet street he chose happened to be one of the city's most popular jogging routes. No sooner had he settled back to snooze when there came a knock on his window. He looked out and saw a jogger running in place.

"Yes?"

"Excuse me, sir," the jogger said, "do you have the time?" The man looked at the car clock and answered, "7:15."

The jogger said thanks and left. The man settled back again, and was just dozing off when there was another knock on the window and another jogger.

"Excuse me, sir, do you have the time?"

"7:25!"

The jogger said thanks and left.

Now the man could see other joggers passing by and he knew it was only a matter of time before another one disturbed him. To avoid the problem, he got out a pen and paper and put a sign in his window saying, "I do not know the time!" Once again he settled back to sleep. He was just dozing off when there was another knock on the window.

"Sir, sir? It's 7:45!"