

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates!

The meteor that recently crashed to earth in Russia was about 55 feet in diameter and weighed around 10,000 tons, making it the largest such object to hit the Earth in more than a century. The meteor has been identified as a chondrite -- pronounced with a hard "K" sound -- which comes from the Greek word for grains of sand. But in the region where the meteor fell, the chondrite goes by another title: A chance to cash in. People have been scrambling to collect pieces of the famous meteor. Although large chunks have yet to be found, smaller fragments of the meteor have fallen throughout the local area.

A black market has developed, with people coming to surrounding villages and offering \$100, \$200 and more for little handfuls of space debris that fell somewhere over Siberia. When a stranger knocked on her door, Larisa Briyukova was offered \$60 for a fist-size stone she found under a hole in the roof tiles of her woodshed. After some negotiation, they settled on a price of \$230. A few hours later, another man pulled up, looked in the hole in the roof, and offered \$1300. "Now I regret selling it," said Ms. Briyukova, "But then, who knows? The police might have come and taken it away, anyway." In a rush to retrieve the fragments, many buried in deep February snows, even children have gotten into the act. Sasha Zarezina, 8, happily plunged into a snow bank near her small village, laughing, kicking and throwing up plumes of powdery snow. Then she stopped, bent over and started to dig. "I found one!" she yelled. "All it takes is looking carefully," said Sasha. "The stones are in the snowdrifts. To find a stone you find a hole. And then you dig."

Although the Torah can be read by the simplest individual, one must delve beneath its surface meaning if one is to discover its true treasures. What will one discover if one 'digs' more deeply into the Torah? Nothing less than guidelines to living a meaningful, purposeful life. A popular misconception is that the word 'Torah' means 'the law.' In fact, 'Torah' means 'instructions.' Instructions for what? Instructions for living, as King Solomon said, "If you seek it (Torah) like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you shall understand awe and reverence of the Lord, and find the knowledge of G-d." (Proverbs 2:4-5)

Parshas Ki Sisa ~ Exodus 30:11 -- 34:35

The portion begins with G-d's command to Moses to take a census by collecting an equal contribution of a half-shekel coin from every adult male between the ages of 20 and 60, with the profits going to the Mishkan (Tabernacle). G-d designates Betzalel, of the tribe of Judah, and Oholiav, of the tribe of Dan, to supervise the upcoming construction of the Mishkan. The mitzvah of Shabbat is then repeated to caution the nation that even the construction of the Mishkan does not supersede the observance of the weekly day of rest.

The Torah returns to the narrative of the Revelation at Mt. Sinai and describes the horrible sin of the golden calf. G-d relents to Moses' prayer that the Children of Israel should be spared from annihilation for this great transgression, and Moses descends from the mountain with the two tablets of the Ten Commandments in hand. Upon witnessing a small segment of the population dancing around the golden calf, Moses smashes the tablets and burns the idol, initiating the process of repentance. Moses again ascends the mountain to pray to G-d that the Jewish people should be forgiven and regain their status as the chosen people. Moses eventually returns with the second set of tablets and a renewed covenant with G-d, his face radiant as a result of the Divine experience.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Remember the time you bought that Hand-Carved, Lady Figurine Extendable Turkey-Foot Back Scratcher, and then rationalized the purchase so that you convinced yourself that, all along, it was a great idea? When we buy something totally unnecessary, faulty, or overly expensive, we often talk ourselves into thinking it was a good deal. Yep, that's post-purchase rationalization in action -- a kind of built-in mechanism that makes us feel better after we make bad decisions, especially at the cash register. Also known as Buyer's Stockholm Syndrome, it's a way of subconsciously justifying our purchases -- especially expensive ones. Social psychologists say it stems from the principle of

commitment, our psychological desire to stay consistent and avoid a state of cognitive dissonance.

Let's say, for example, you can't decide between two popular cars, but in the end decide to buy the one that many of your friends also own. After purchasing it, you may find it has a lack of features, a weak MPG rating, and a predisposition to defects compared to the car you 'almost' bought. However, you don't want to feel you made the wrong decision, and so you'll try to convince your friends -- and yourself -- that your original choice was the correct one, and that your opinion is better than everyone's opinion. And you may even use a 'sour grapes' tactic: Denigrating the car you didn't buy, because you can no longer have it.

The human brain is capable of trillions of processes per second, making it far more powerful than any computer currently in existence. If so, why do we often exercise poor judgment? We're subject to cognitive biases, those annoying glitches in our thinking that cause us to make questionable decisions and reach erroneous conclusions. It takes wisdom to counter our cognitive biases. The human condition makes it nearly impossible to totally remove personal bias from our decisions. However, the perspective of a good friend, teacher or mentor can provide insights to help us see reality more clearly. Ethics of the Fathers advises, "Make for yourself a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend." For decisions big and small, seek advice from friends, teachers and mentors.

Quote of the Week

The only thing chicken about Israel is their soup -- *Bob Hope*

Joke of the Week

Rabbi Cohen met one of his congregants on the street one day. After exchanging greetings, the lady asked him, "Rabbi, is it a sin for my husband to play golf on Shabbos?"

With a twinkle in his eye, Rabbi Cohen answered without hesitation, "The kind of golf your husband plays is a sin any day of the week."