

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason

Parshas Balak July 4, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Landon Michelson, a 22-year-old amateur playing in the U.S. Open sectional event in Florida this past June, had caught a bit of luck. He wasn't even in the field of 55 players going for four spots at the U.S. Open when another golfer pulled out of the qualifier and left a spot open for an alternate. That belonged to Landon, who went out in the 36-hole qualifier and shot two outstanding rounds of 1-under 71s. However, Landon mistakenly signed his scorecard for a second-round 70 instead of a 71. That presented to the young golfer a great dilemma: Inform officials of his mistake, knowing the consequences meant not only a penalty but also missing out on his dream to play in the U.S. Open, or keep quiet and live with the knowledge that you cheated the game you love.

Michelson admitted the error, pointing to a senior project he completed while at Rice about Blayne Barber, the young man who disqualifyed himself from the second stage of PGA Tour Q-School back in 2012 when he didn't know if he had brushed a leaf out a bunker during his second round.

"If you think about it, I'm like the 1,000th-ranked amateur in the world," Landon said. "Going to the U.S. Open, it would be so much to me. Getting clothing sponsors, club sponsors ... everything would have been so much easier."

All of us regularly face situations when we're forced to choose between doing the right thing, or to make ethical compromises with promises of great gain. How do we decide what is right, and more importantly, what is right for us in our unique situation? Living with integrity means keeping in the forefront of our mind the following Torah teaching: *"The signature of the Holy One, blessed be He, is truth."* Let us strive to become individuals of outstanding honesty and integrity.

Parshas Balak Numbers 22:2 - 25:9

This week's portion shifts from the Jewish people's travels in the desert to the story of Bilam, the anti-Semitic prophet who attempted to curse the Children of Israel. Hired by Balak, the king of Moav, Bilam embarks upon a journey to the Israelite encampment. An angel brandishing a sword blocks Bilam's path, causing his donkey to repeatedly swerve off the road. Unable to see the angel, Bilam responds by striking the donkey three times. Miraculously, G-d causes the donkey to speak to Bilam -- shades of Mr. Ed, the talking horse in the 1960's TV show! Bilam's eyes are uncovered, and the humiliated prophet sees the angel standing in the path. The angel reminds Bilam that he may only speak the words that G-d places in his mouth. Upon arrival near the Jewish camp, Bilam repeatedly attempts to curse the people; each time G-d prevents him from doing so, but instead he ends up uttering several sets of praises, much to Balak's dismay.

The Torah portion concludes with the Jewish men's debauchery with the promiscuous daughters of Moav and Midian, and the public immoral act of Zimri (a prince of the tribe of Simeon) with a Midianite princess. Pinchas, Aaron's grandson, zealously responds by piercing them to death with a spear, halting a plague from G-d which had broken out in the camp.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Summer is here, and for many, vacation season. What's the best part of taking a vacation? Scientists questioned over 900 test participants about their happiness before and after a trip and what they found surprised them. The most happiness wasn't experienced after or even during the trip, but beforehand. According to the study's lead author: "Vacations do make people happy. But we found people who are anticipating holiday trips show signs of increased happiness."

Having something to look forward to isn't just a subjective experience of positive expectations, it creates positive changes in the brain too. As highlighted in *The Happiness Advantage*, people who just thought about watching their favorite movie raised their endorphin level by 27 percent. Indeed, anticipation is a

powerful mood booster. Anticipating future rewards can actually light up the pleasure centers in your brain as much as the actual reward will. Given the benefits of anticipation, put a trip on the calendar and consider the following:

Research: Study guidebooks, learn about the area and immerse yourself in future travel plans.

Prep: If planning a physical adventure – hiking in the rainforest, climbing Taum Sauk Mountain (hint: it's in Missouri), white water rafting, prepare your body beforehand. If planning a trip to Israel, brush up on your Hebrew so you can order a falafel, *eem charif!*

Travel more: If you have two weeks of vacation a year, take two separate weeks rather than taking it all at one time. Better yet, take several long weekends. Studies show you will remember and appreciate different shorter experiences rather than one long one. If getting out of town isn't an option, try a staycation: research and compile all the things you wish you could do in your hometown.

Living with joy (*b'simcha*) means to experience pleasure in the 'now', and to experience the joy of potential pleasure (see Ethics of the Fathers 6:6). May you have an enjoyable, safe summer.

Quote of the Week

It's never too late to be who you might have been. – ***Mary Anne Evans, English novelist who wrote under the pen-name George Eliot (1819 - 1880)***

Joke of the Week

Can someone please explain why

If money doesn't grow on trees, why do banks have branches?

What disease did cured ham have?

Why do we say we "slept like a baby" when babies wake up every hour and a half?

Why do we yell "Heads up!" when we should be yelling "Heads down!"

Why is it called the Department of the Interior when they are in charge of everything outdoors?

Why is it called quicksand when it sucks you down very, very slowly?

How did the "Keep Off the Grass" sign get there in the first place?