

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*  
*Parshas Bamidbar May 23, 2015*

*"Never Too Late: She Earned Her Ph.D. at Age 102!"*

Ingeborg Rapoport was 25 when she wrote her doctoral thesis, but she had to wait until 2015 to defend it before an academic committee -- 77 years later. Ms. Rapoport, a 102-year-old retired neonatologist who lives in Berlin, submitted her original scholarly work on the subject of diphtheria to the University of Hamburg in 1938. Ms. Rapoport's professor, a one-time Nazi party member, praised her work, she recalled. But that wasn't enough. "I was told I wasn't permitted to take the oral examination," she said. Academic authorities in Berlin cited "racial reasons" for the ban: With a Jewish mother, the Nazis considered Ms. Rapoport "a first-degree crossbreed," in Nazi parlance. She was therefore ineligible for academic advancement and her medical career was categorically suspended.

This past month, three professors from the University of Hamburg settled into the brown-and-orange furniture in Ms. Rapoport's Berlin living room and drilled her for 45 minutes before approving her doctorate -- nearly eight decades after she applied. "It was a very good test," said Dr. Uwe Koch-Gromus, Dean of the medical department. "Frau Rapoport has gathered notable knowledge about what's happened since then. Particularly given her age, she was brilliant." The university has scheduled a ceremony in Hamburg on June 9, when Ms. Rapoport will become the oldest person ever to receive a doctoral degree. Guinness World Records has cited a 97-year-old German as the soon-to-be previous oldest recipient of a doctorate.

King David had an appreciation for late bloomers. In his Song of Shabbos, King David wrote: *Od y'nuvun b'seivah, k'rananim yee'yu* (Psalm 92:15) "Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green." We may be too old to run marathons, but life will always continue to offer us challenges and new opportunities. Like Ingeborg Rapoport, seize your opportunities; your job in life is never done.

*Parshas Bamidbar 1:1 -- 4:20*

This week we begin reading Sefer Bamidbar -- known in English as 'The Book of Numbers'. Bamidbar ('in the wilderness') begins with G-d telling Moses to take a census of all men over the age of 20. If you like names and numbers, you'll love this week's portion. The count reveals just over 600,000, excluding the Levites who weren't included in the census. We also find described the manner in which the Jewish People camped around the Mishkan (Tabernacle), and the order in which they traveled during the 40 years in the desert. The Jewish People were arranged in four sections around the Mishkan; east, south, west and north. The Levites are singled out for special responsibilities. A formal transfer is made between the first-born and the Levites, whereby the Levites take over the role the first-born would have served. The sons of Levi are divided into three main families; Gershon, Kehas and Merari. Each is given a special task in transporting the Mishkan.

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

The Internet may not make you any smarter, but it will make you think you are. A new study suggests that searching the Internet makes people feel they know more than they really do -- almost regardless of whether people find the information for which they were searching. Researchers carried out nine experiments that involved more than 1,000 volunteers. Volunteers were asked to look up answers on the Internet to such questions as, "Why are there dimples on a golf ball?" and "How does a zipper work?" In one of the experiments people were asked: "Why is ancient Kushite history more peaceful than Greek history?" Even when they couldn't find complete answers to this very difficult question, simple searching made people more confident their personal knowledge was greater. This was true even when researchers blocked their searches so they couldn't find out anything at all.

Matthew Fisher, who led the research, said: "The Internet is such a powerful environment, where you can enter any question, and you basically have access to the world's knowledge at your fingertips. It becomes easier to confuse your own knowledge with this external source. When people are truly on their own, they may be wildly inaccurate about how much they know and how dependent they are on the

Internet." The study was published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* (Fisher et al., 2015) Mr. Fisher said that he considers the Internet beneficial, but he cautioned: "People using the Internet are less likely to appreciate the gaps in their understanding."

"I don't know" is a phrase as deserved as it is rare these days. Opinions are routinely offered as indisputable facts. Whether in religious, political, scientific or social realms, a little bit of knowledge -- and certainly, inaccurate information -- is dangerous. As the Talmud puts it: "Teach your tongue to say 'I do not know'" (Berachot, 4a).

### *Quote of the Week*

The true and noble way to kill a foe, is not to kill him; you, with kindness, may so change him that he shall cease to be a foe, and then he's slain. -- *Charles Aley* (*English poet, died 1640*)

### **Joke of the Week**

A married daughter calls her mother: "Hello Ma?"

"Shirley darling, what's the problem?"

"Oh Ma, I don't know where to start. Both of the kids have the flu. The fridge has just broken down. The sink is leaking. In 2 hours the Sisterhood is coming over for lunch. What should I do?"

"Shirley darling, don't worry. I'm going to get on the bus and go into the city. Then I'll take the train out to Long Island. Then I'll walk the 2 miles from the station to your house. I'll take care of the kids, I'll cook a nice lunch for the sisterhood and I'll even make dinner for Barry."

"Barry? Who's Barry?"

"Barry, your husband!"

"But Ma, my husband's name is Gary. Is this 555-2093?"

"No, this is 555-2903."

(Pause)

"Does this mean you're not coming over?"