

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Do miracles still happen? Monique van der Vorst would be quick to answer an enthusiastic "YES!" Monique, of Holland, was partially paralyzed from the hip down at 13 during a routine ankle operation. Years later she went on to win a silver medal for hand-cycling in the 2008 Beijing Paralympics. That same year she was hit by a car while training in her wheelchair and endured a spinal cord injury, leaving her completely paralyzed from the waist down. Undeterred, though, Monique continued to hand-cycle. Last summer things seemed to go from bad to worse when she collided with a cyclist. However, while recovering in the hospital, Monique discovered that she could move her feet. Something had occurred during the accident that reversed her paralysis. Against all odds, Monique began to walk, and with intense rehabilitation eventually began riding a standard bicycle.

Doctors are still stumped by her astonishing recovery. Some theorize that the trauma of her last accident might have jolted her body back into activity. Monique, now 27, was recently given one of just 11 places on a top women's professional cycling team. Her dream is to ride in the 2016 Olympics.

Albert Einstein said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." There is more to life than what meets the eye. This Chanukah, a holiday of miracles, let us open our eyes to see the miracles that surround us.

Parshas Mikeitz Genesis 41:1 -- 44:17

Pharaoh has a two-part dream about seven scrawny cows devouring seven robust cows, followed by seven thin stalks of grain swallowing seven healthy, good ones. When his advisers are unable to adequately interpret the dream, Pharaoh summons Joseph, who had been in prison for a total of twelve years. Ascribing his power of interpretation solely to G-d, Joseph tells Pharaoh that Egypt will first experience seven years of abundant crops, and then will be ravaged by a devastating famine. Pharaoh appoints Joseph as viceroy of Egypt, making him the second most powerful man in the land (this is a source for the game of tennis in the Torah -- we see that Joseph ... served in Pharaoh's court). Joseph's wife Asnat gives birth to two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, and the years of plenty and famine unfold just as Joseph had predicted.

With the famine devastating the land of Canaan (Israel), Joseph's brothers descend to Egypt to purchase food. When they don't recognize their royal brother, Joseph sets in motion a plan to determine if the brothers have fully repented for their sin of selling him almost twenty-two years before. Joseph acts detached, accusing them of being spies, and holds Simeon hostage. Joseph then allows the rest of the brothers to go with food to their father on the condition that they return with their youngest brother Benjamin. With great reluctance, Jacob agrees to this condition. Mikeitz concludes with the looming threat that Benjamin will be made a slave to the Egyptian ruler.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Got gelt? Though many are accustomed to giving presents on Chanukah, playing dreidel for money (gelt) is an old spin (pun intended) on a traditional Chanukah experience. Dreidels find their way into Jewish homes of all levels of observance both in Israel and the world over. What connection is there between Chanukah and money?

The Hebrew word Chanukah shares the same root as chinuch, education. The occupying Greek forces wanted to make the Jewish population forget the Torah and its way of life. After the defeat of the Greeks, it was necessary to re-educate a large segment of the Jewish people -- particularly the children. Maimonides writes that it is important to use incentives to educate children until they are old enough to independently appreciate the beauty and importance of living a Jewishly committed life. On Chanukah, a holiday dedicated to education, we give our children Chanukah gelt to add to the festive spirit of the holiday and to encourage them in the study of Torah and observance of the mitzvos.

Chanukah gelt can be given any time throughout Chanukah (aside from Shabbos). Some have the admirable custom of gelt-giving each weeknight of Chanukah. This year, as our dreidels spin, may we all remember the spiritual values of Chanukah: the primacy of living a committed Jewish life, and the small miracles that constantly surround us.

Quote of the Week

People do not live by bread alone. They need buttering up once in a while.
-- Harvey Mackay

Joke of the Week

Yankel is talking to G-d and asks, "Hey G-d what does 100 million years seem like to you?"
G-d answers, " One hundred million years? That's like a second to me."
Then Yankel asks, "Hey G-d, what does 100 million dollars seem like to you?"
One hundred million dollars? It seems like a penny to me."
So Yankel says, "Hey G-d could I have a penny?"
And G-d answers, "Sure. In a second."

=====

Comments, questions, requests to be added to our email list or better jokes can be sent to pepshort613@gmail.com or adarabba@hotmail.com Care to know more about Nusach Hari Bnai Zion Congregation? Check us out at www.nhbz.org If you enjoyed Beyond Twelve Gates, please share with a friend. Thanks to Alan Haber for his assistance in distributing BTG