

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Va'eschanan August 1, 2015

“Joe, the One-Armed Cyclist!”

What do you do when life throws you a curve? Joe Berenyi used to be the one throwing the curves as a left-handed pitcher in college in the late 1980s. Then suddenly in 1994 life threw the Oswego, IL resident a proverbial breaking ball. In a life-altering construction accident, Joe lost his right arm, severely broke a leg and shattered his left kneecap, which had to be removed. An athlete his whole life, Joe went several years after surgery without any sports in his life. But eventually he decided it was time to start, not stop, spinning his wheels. So he began to ride the bike trails near his home. Back on a retrofitted bike enabling him to ride with one arm, Joe eventually started craving competition. "I like to go fast," he said. Joe's wife, Jill, says she wasn't surprised. "Once he started getting competitive, I was thinking, 'He can do this. He just set his mind to it.'" Joe said, "The competitiveness came back."

As Joe continued to progress in cycling, he began to compete in races, and won several gold medals in national competitions. The years of pain, suffering, sacrifice, determination and perseverance all culminated when Joe made the U.S. Paralympic cycling team, joined an elite group of athletes in London for the 2012 Paralympic Games -- and won a gold medal (see the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mKHauj8mNw>) "I have never met anyone who is as dedicated, focused and works as hard as Joe," proclaimed Mike Farrell, co-owner of an Oswego bike shop. Mary Johnson, a waitress at a local restaurant, said, "Joe is just a super guy. He's very determined. He's always out on his bike. He's very quiet, but he has a magnetic personality." Mary Lee Geraghty, vice president of a cycling club, said, "To see a guy who's been through so much turn it into a positive," she said, "he's an inspiration to everybody." For his part, Joe said about his cycling, "I don't do it for the recognition or for anyone else, really. It's just so I can do the best with what I have."

There are two ways to do anything in life -- you can give it your best, or you can do it "half-baked." G-d blesses those who give it their best. The Almighty rarely intervenes with open miracles in our daily lives; He expects us to put it together ourselves. But once we get started, G-d indeed joins in to help. Jewish consciousness teaches that G-d says, "Open for Me an opening the size of the eye of a needle, and I will open for you one the size of a hall." Like Joe Berenyi, we have to do the very best with whatever we have.

Parshas Va'eschanan Deuteronomy 3:23 - 7:11

Moses continues his final speech to the Children of Israel. He tells them how he entreated G-d to allow him to enter the land of Israel, but his request was denied. Moses was allowed, however, to see the Promised Land from the peak of Mount Pisgah.

Moses appeals to the people to keep the Torah and its commandments, telling them to neither add to nor subtract from its mitzvos. They are told to always remember the incredible Revelation they experienced at Mt. Sinai where every man, woman and child heard the presentation of the Ten Commandments. Moses repeats the Ten Commandments, with subtle differences between this version and the one found in the Book of Exodus. Did you ever wonder where the Shema comes from? It is found in this week's Torah portion. The Shema expresses our belief that G-d is One and states our commitment to love and serve Him. It exhorts us to transmit Torah to the next generation, and its laws should be remembered by a 'sign' upon one's hand and forehead (tefillin) and written on the doorposts of one's home (mezuzah). Finally, Moses encourages the people to trust in G-d and remain faithful to the Torah. Inter-marriage is prohibited, and the source that Jewish identity is transmitted through the mother is stated.

Rabbinic Ruminations

We often experience rudeness and incivility. From simple insults and offhand remarks to purposely excluding others from groups, these behaviors are largely tolerated in our daily lives and in the workplace. A growing body of research offers compelling evidence that experiencing rudeness, and even simply witnessing rudeness, can have surprisingly harmful effects on performance, creativity and even helpfulness. However, it might not even end there. What if rudeness, like the common cold, was actually

contagious? To explore this phenomenon, researchers at the University of Florida conducted [a study](#) (*Journal of Applied Psychology* - 2015) to find out if rudeness was contagious from one person to another.

Over the course of a seven-week period, graduate students engaged in negotiations exercises with various partners. After each negotiation, participants had the opportunity to rate how rudely their negotiation partner had behaved. Participants weren't instructed to be rude; the researchers simply measured the normal rudeness that was present in the negotiation setting. It was found that rudeness is in fact contagious. If negotiators felt that their negotiation partner was rude, when they went on to their next negotiation, their new partner in turn perceived them as rude. Another surprising finding was how long this effect lasted. Even if negotiations were a week apart, the rudeness experienced in the previous negotiation still caused participants to be rude in their next negotiation. Rudeness spreads so easily partly because people are remarkably tolerant of it. Lead researcher Dr. Trevor Faulk said, "Part of the problem is that we are generally tolerant of these behaviors, but they're actually really harmful."

A fundamental Jewish principle states: "*Derech erez kadma l'Torah*" -- meaning that "decency, kind behavior should precede Torah." In its most basic sense, this concept expresses that it is impossible to be rude, arrogant, rough and unpleasant while remaining a good person and a good Jew. The Torah teaches that an integral component of being a mensch is being polite and civil to others.

Quote of the Week

I remind myself every morning: Nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I'm going to learn, I must do it by listening. -- *Larry King*

Joke of the Week

Moshe was in a supermarket in a Jewish neighborhood. He saw a woman who clearly appeared to be not Jewish, trying to get her young child to put down a candy bar he had picked off the shelf.

"Kedarlaomer, you put that down! It's not kosher!"

Intrigued, Moshe decided to investigate.

"Excuse me, ma'am, are you Jewish?"

"No."

"So why did you say that?"

"Why? I'll tell you why. When I see all those Jewish mothers saying that to their kids -- and it works, so I decided to try it."