

*Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*  
*Parshas Re'eh August 2, 2013*

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates*

Husband and wife of 75 years Helen and Les Brown of Long Beach, California, died within one day of each other earlier this month. They were both 94, and had been suffering from different illnesses. The synchronicity of their deaths was nothing new: The two former high school sweethearts shared the same birthday of Dec. 31, 1918. Their son, Les Jr., said, "They really enjoyed each other's company. They were really inseparable and were never apart." In high school neither of their families anticipated the relationship would last, much less turn into a three-quarters-of-a-century marriage, because of their different socioeconomic backgrounds. Les's father was a successful businessman; Helen's father worked on the railroad.

Zach Henderson, owner of the Ma N' Pa Grocery in Long Beach, Calif., said he saw the couple almost daily and called their relationship "a wonderful blessing." "About a year ago, [Helen] had her hand on his face and they were cheek to cheek," Henderson said. "She said, 'Isn't he the most handsome man you've ever seen?' That's exactly how they were. They were full of love and passion." Henderson said that even though the couple were in their 90s they remained active in their community and insisted a local band set up in their driveway during a residential block party. Son Les Jr. said, "[Love] knows no barriers and seems to know no bounds. They were from different sides of the tracks and it didn't seem to matter to them. After 78 years, they were very much in love."

Most of us will end up getting married at some point in our lives. What is the role of love in a marriage? The Torah says that Isaac took Rebecca into his tent and then he loved her. (Genesis 24:67) Note the order: first came marriage, then love. Just as married couples begin to physically resemble each other, love grows continuously as understanding and appreciation of one's spouse increases. Robert Browning wrote, "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be." Over the course of time, true love will grow like a carefully tended garden.

*Parshas Re'eh Deuteronomy 11:26 - 16:17*

Moses informs the Jewish people that we each face a choice; choose to observe G-d's directions for living (i.e. the Torah) and receive blessings, or choose to ignore G-d and experience estrangement and its consequences. Moses then turns to describing a number of religious, civil and social laws relevant once the Jewish people enter the Promised Land. Included in this listing are:

- Don't imitate the ways of the nations surrounding you
- A false prophet who attempts to entice you to idolatry should be put to death
- Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added to or subtracted from it
- Self infliction of wounds on the body as a sign of mourning is prohibited
- As a holy people, refrain from eating 'non-kosher' food
- Be particularly warm-hearted and charitable. Many laws and guidelines concerning tzedakah (righteous giving) are found in this week's portion
- The three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Shavous and Sukkos) are opportunities to ascend (make aliyah) to Jerusalem and the Temple to celebrate our blessings

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

Does practice make perfect -- or least, guarantee a first-place finish? Cyclist Michael Shermer wrote that midway through the 1985 Race Across America, the 3,000-mile nonstop transcontinental bicycle race in which he rode as a competitor, Diana Nyad of ABC's "Wide World of Sports" inquired what he might have done better in training in order to be able to catch the lead rider in front of him. "I should have picked better parents," Shermer answered, explaining that we all have certain genetic limitations that can't be overcome through training.

In "The Sports Gene," a book on the relative roles of genes and environment, author David Epstein writes that science shows that by nature humans vary considerably in both physical and mental abilities, and a good portion of that variation is due to our genes. In the early 20th century, psychologist Edward Thorndike discovered that, while practice makes a difference, some people benefit from practice more than others. In the Heritage Family Study, first funded in 1992, results from a stationary bicycle-training study showed that about half of each person's ability to improve their aerobic capacity with training was determined exclusively by their parents. David Epstein explained that the amount that any person improved in the study had nothing to do with how aerobically fit he or she was relative to others to begin with. Rather, it had to do with genetic inheritance.

The danger exists, however, in using genetic inheritance as an excuse for poor performance. A highly significant quality for outstanding accomplishment is practice and perseverance. Proverbs (12:24) says, "Work hard and become a leader; be lazy and never succeed." Perseverance overcomes almost everything, even nature itself. The ability to stay on course without distraction or diversion enables individuals of moderate capabilities to attain achievements that elude those with greater potential. Trying and practicing may not make you better than the next person, but it will make you the best you can be. What each of us does with G-d's gifts is what counts.

### *Quote of the Week*

All good is hard. All evil is easy. Dying, losing, cheating, and mediocrity are easy. Stay away from easy.  
-- *Scott Alexander*

### **Joke of the Week**

A large, well established, lumber camp advertised that they were looking for a good Lumberjack. The next day, a skinny little man showed up at the camp with his axe, and knocked on the head lumberjacks' door. The head lumberjack took one look at the little man and told him to leave.

"Just give me a chance to show you what I can do," said the skinny man.

"Okay, see that giant tree over there?" said the lumberjack. "Take your axe and go cut it down."

The skinny man headed for the tree, and in five minutes he was back knocking on the lumberjack's door.

"I cut the tree down," said the man.

The lumberjack couldn't believe his eyes and said, "Where did you get the skill to chop down trees like that?"

"In the Sahara Forest," replied the puny man.

"You mean the Sahara Desert," said the lumberjack.

The little man laughed and answered back, "Oh sure, that's what they call it now!"