

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason Parshas Vayechi December 14, 2013

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

The *Most Interesting Man in the World* is a character in an advertising campaign for the *Dos Equis* brand of beer. The advertisements feature a bearded, debonair gentleman roughly in his 70s, portrayed by actor Jonathan Goldsmith. The advertisements feature a montage of daring exploits involving "the most interesting man" when he was younger.

The precise settings are never revealed, but he performs feats such as: freeing an angry bear from a painful-looking bear trap; shooting a pool trick shot before an Indian audience (by shooting the cue ball out of the mouth of a man lying on the pool table); catching a marlin while cavorting in a Hemingway-esque scene with a beautiful, young woman; winning an arm-wrestling match in a South American setting; and surfing a killer-wave. The commercial voiceovers are intended to be both humorous and outrageous ("if he were to punch you in the face, you would have to fight off the strong urge to thank him"; "he can speak French, in Russian"; "he once parallel-parked a train"; "his two cents is worth \$37 and change"; "even his enemies list him as their emergency contact").

At the end of the advertisement, the interesting man says, "I don't always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer *Dos Equis*." Each commercial ends with him stating the signature sign-off: "Stay thirsty, my friends." According to the company, U.S. sales increased each year between 2006-2010, and tripled in Canada in 2008. Sales of *Dos Equis* are said to have increased by 22% at a time when sale of other imported beer fell 4% in the U.S. Jonathan Goldsmith said in an interview that he realized how successful the campaign had been when a man came up to him in a restaurant, telling him that he had asked his young son what he wanted to be when he grew up, and the son replied: "I want to be The Most Interesting Man in the World."

Who is the most interesting person you know? Every person we meet is a new source of knowledge. Certainly, those who we already know have many life lessons to teach us. We can learn kindness and compassion from kind and compassionate people. We can learn courage from each person who has it. Humanity is your open university. "Who is wise? The one who learns from all people." (Ethics of the Fathers 4:1)

Parshas Vayechi Genesis 47:28 -- 50:26

The final portion of the first book of the Torah describes Jacob's actions immediately preceding his death in Egypt. Jacob makes Joseph swear to bury him in the land of Israel, and then gives Joseph's two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, a special blessing. Notwithstanding Joseph's protest, Jacob insists on giving the younger Ephraim the right-hand position of primacy during the blessing (is this the origin of 'my right-hand man'?).

Jacob then proceeds to give each of his other sons their individual blessings in accordance with their own unique character traits and life purpose. Jacob passes away at the age of 147. He then is brought by his sons and accompanied by a great procession of Egyptian royalty to the land of Israel where he is buried in M'aras HaMachpelah (The Tomb of the Patriarchs). Upon returning to Egypt, Joseph's brothers fear that he will finally take revenge now that their father is dead. However, Joseph reassures them that he bears no hard feelings. The portion concludes with Joseph's death and the Jewish people's promise to carry his bones with them to Israel when they are finally redeemed.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Do you know someone who has every gadget known to man (or woman)? Does your friend's closet contain lots of shoes or clothes that they almost never wear? Do they feel lost without credit cards? Do they come home with things they didn't specifically go to buy? Do they use shopping as a quick fix for the blues? Do they spend more than they can afford? Do neighborhood malls and Internet shopping sites possess a mesmerizing magnetic appeal for your friend?

If you answered yes to several questions above, your friend may have a condition called *Oniomania*. It is also known as shopping addiction or shopaholism; the compulsive desire to shop. People who shop or spend compulsively get a feeling of being "high" from the experience. This translates into endorphins and dopamine, natural receptor sites in the brain, getting turned on, creating a "good feeling" and reinforcing the desire to shop or spend.

While not offering a cure, shopping at a dollar store may help the oniomaniac. Thanks to the way our brains work, a dollar store shopping spree can satisfy those with shopping cravings even better than shopping at a more expensive store. "Dollar stores are a great option for shopping sprees because of the way the mind translates purchases into pleasures," says Jeremy Shapiro, an adjunct professor at Case Western Reserve University's Department of Psychological Sciences. "We get a little kick from each purchase we make, and the size of the purchase makes less difference than the number of buys." As he explains, we get more enjoyment from a bunch of small purchases than from one big buy. So the next time you want to splurge, try doing it by heading to the dollar store.

Yehuda ben Teima would say (Ethics of the Fathers 5:20): *Be light as an eagle to do the will of your Father in heaven.* According to our rabbis, this teaches us about overcoming an obstacle to religious and spiritual fulfillment: Materialism. While few people are oniomaniacs, striking a proper balance between materialism and spirituality is a challenge. Like the eagle, we should soar above coarse materialism.

Quote of the Week

Time is what we want most, but what we use worst. -- *William Penn*

Joke of the Week

When Albert Einstein was making the rounds of the speaker's circuit, he found himself tiring of the grind. One night Einstein mentioned to his chauffeur (a man who somewhat resembled Einstein in looks & manner) that he was tired of speechmaking. "I have an idea, boss," he said. "I've heard you give this speech so many times. I'll bet I could give it for you." Einstein laughed loudly and said, "Why not? Let's do it!"

When they arrived at the dinner, Einstein donned the chauffeur's cap and jacket and sat in the back of the room. The chauffeur gave a beautiful rendition of Einstein's speech and even answered a few questions expertly.

Then a pompous professor asked an extremely esoteric question about anti-matter formation, digressing here and there to let everyone in the audience know that he was nobody's fool. Without missing a beat, the chauffeur fixed the professor with a steely stare and said, "Sir, the answer to that question is so simple that I will let my chauffeur, who is sitting in the back, answer it for me!"