

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Shemos December 21, 2013

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Fifteen minutes isn't much time, right? Wrong. There are lots of things you can get done in 15 minutes. Here are five extremely useful things you can do in 15 minutes.

1. Study Torah. You can read the *Tenach* -- the 5 Books of Moses, Prophets and Writings -- from cover to cover in one year by reading for fifteen minutes a day.

2. Get Fit. Get fit in fifteen minutes. Walk around your neighborhood or at the mall. Pump up the tires of your old bike, and ride it. Use Crossfit - a hard-core, military-style workout.

3. Declutter. Marla Cilley is the Fly Lady. She writes a blog—FlyLady.net—filled with advice to help people with housekeeping. The core of her organizational technique is the idea that you can conquer clutter in just fifteen minutes a day. She offers five tools to help you do this, including the 27-Fling Boogie, the Hot-Spot Fire Drill, and the Five Minute Room Rescue.

4. Strengthen Your Relationships. If you have an extra fifteen minutes use them to email a friend or call your sister. Better yet, call your grandmother (grandmothers love it when you call them). You can also use the fifteen minutes to arrange a coffee or lunch meeting with someone you've been meaning to reconnect with.

5. Do Some Honest Introspection. Spend fifteen minutes honestly evaluating your Jewish commitment, your career, your relationships, and the progress that you're making on achieving your goals. Ask yourself questions such as the following:

Are you heading in the right direction?

Is there any area of your life that you've been neglecting?

Are you getting everything you need?.

We can make great improvements to our lives by using scraps of time: fifteen minutes left over here, and fifteen minutes found over there.

Parshas Shemos Exodus 1:1 -- 6:1

The book of Exodus begins by describing the gradually increasing enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt. Pharaoh, fearing the population explosion of the Jews, initially hopes that backbreaking labor would stunt their rapid physical growth. When their birth rate continues to increase he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all baby boys. Moses is born, and when his mother is unable to keep him hidden from the Egyptian authorities any longer she places him in a basket and sends him down the Nile River. He is found by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in the royal palace, even though she realizes he is a Hebrew. She names him Moshe (Moses) meaning "drawn from the water." Years later as a grown man, Moses kills an Egyptian who he witnessed beating a Jew. Moses flees to the land of Midian and marries Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, and they have two sons.

When Moses is shepherding his father-in-law's flock, he witnesses the "burning bush" on Chorev (Mt. Sinai) where G-d commands him to lead the Jewish people from Egypt to the land of Israel, which G-d promised to their ancestors. Initially reluctant, Moses is shown three miracles to perform before the Jewish people to prove he was sent by G-d: Changing his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprous one, and water into blood. Moses, accompanied by his brother Aaron, encounters an obstinate Pharaoh. The Egyptian king not only refuses their request for a three-day respite to worship G-d, but declares that the Jews must produce the same quota of bricks as before but without being given straw. The people complain to Moses and Aaron for making their situation worse, but G-d assures Moses that He will force Pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave.

Rabbinical Ruminations

Remember going on school field trips? For decades, American students have piled into yellow buses to visit a variety of cultural institutions, including art, natural history, and science museums, as well as theaters, zoos, and historical sites. Today, however, culturally enriching field trips are an endangered species. Museums across the country report a steep drop in school tours. For example, the Field Museum in Chicago at one time welcomed more than 300,000 students every year. Recently the number

is below 200,000. But a new large-scale experiment on over 10,000 students finds that a one-hour tour of an art museum can increase their critical thinking, historical empathy, tolerance, and sustained interest in visiting art museums.

The large majority of students who had visited the newly-opened Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Northwest Arkansas were able to recall information about the paintings they had seen. For example, the researchers found that 82 percent of students who saw Norman Rockwell's *Rosie the Riveter* knew that the painting emphasized the importance of women entering the workforce during World War II. Students who visited the museum were also more likely to express tolerance and historical empathy when completing their surveys. Researchers evaluated these traits by asking students to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements like "I can imagine what life was like for people 100 years ago," "When looking at a painting that shows people, I try to imagine what those people are thinking," and "I think people can have different opinions about the same thing." The museum had clearly been a mind-expanding experience for the young people.

While field trips seek to help our children develop into civilized people who appreciate the breadth of human accomplishments -- a highly worthy goal -- the Torah helps us to develop into moral, decent people. Most civilized people today would say that it is wrong to steal, murder, or oppress the helpless. Yet people often define who it is wrong to harm in self-serving ways. It was the Torah that gave the world definitions of morality that truly respect the dignity of human beings, especially those that are powerless, in ways that are still unmatched by any other culture.

Quote of the Week

After the game, the king and pawn go into the same box -- *Italian proverb*

Joke of the Week

One day a professor was giving a big test to his students. He handed out all of the tests and went back to his desk to wait. Once the test was over, the students all handed the tests back in. The professor noticed that one of the students had attached a \$100 bill to his test with a note saying "A dollar per point."

At the next class the professor handed the tests back out. This student got back his test and \$56 change.