

*Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Vaeira December 28, 2013*

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Want to know what makes you tick? Tell Michelle Zhou what you tweet. Michelle, an IBM researcher, says she can make a good educated guess about your personality just from looking at 200 of your Twitter messages. While it may seem obvious that people typically express their personalities through their words, an analytic evaluation based on word choice can, Michelle says, enable "computers (to) derive people's traits from linguistic footprints." Companies that pay attention to this research could save hundreds of millions of dollars -- and stop annoying people.

Today's marketers gather terabytes (i.e. oodles) of data on potential customers so they can tailor their commercial messages to specific groups. But they can get that targeting wrong because they are trying to understand customers by studying demographics (age, sex, marital status, home, income) and current buying habits. Companies spent \$170 billion last year on delivering unsolicited electronic junk mail, with an effectiveness rate of just 0.1 percent! Understanding intrinsic personality traits can tell a marketer a lot. For instance, it is known that idealistic people often opt to buy organic foods or use organic skin care products. People who are happy or depressed use different words, and make different marketplace choices.

If our behavior and decision-making process is heavily influenced by our intrinsic traits -- is it possible to change those traits? Judaism teaches that one who acts a certain way -- whatever his intentions -- will be influenced by his deeds and will eventually become the person he impersonates. Want to become a good person? Do good things. Our traits influence our behavior, but our behavior shapes and molds our traits. Behave a certain way, and it will become you.

Parshas Vaeira Exodus 6:2 -- 9:35

G-d assures Moses that He will indeed redeem the Jewish people from slavery and bring them into the land of Israel. After the Torah presents a detailed genealogy of the tribe of Levi (Moses' family), Moses and Aaron go before Pharaoh to request a three-day hiatus from work so that the Jewish people can worship G-d in the desert. Moses' staff is miraculously turned into a snake as a sign of their Divine mission. When the Egyptian sorcerers counter by transforming their staffs into snakes as well, Moses' staff swallows up theirs. Even so, Pharaoh adamantly refuses to free the Jewish people, and the series of ten gruesome plagues begins.

The first seven plagues are described in this week's Torah portion; blood, frogs, lice, a swarm of wild beasts, pestilence, boils and hail. Moses goes down to the river to speak to the Egyptian king -- however, Pharaoh remains in denial ('in d'Nile' -- get it?) continuing to refuse to free the Jewish people as his heart is hardened. The portion comes to a close in the middle of these momentous events.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Four years ago, Dan McLaughlin quit his job as a commercial photographer and made a decision to pursue his dream to play in the Masters Golf Tournament. A not-so-minor detail is that he hadn't played much golf. McLaughlin decided to become a professional after reading Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*, which examines a study that says it takes 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to master any skill. He's now on the "Dan Plan," which involves golfing for 10,000 hours—which will take six and a half years of full-time commitment—with the goal of becoming one of the roughly 250 men on the PGA Tour out of the more than 60 million golfers in the world.

Dan McLaughlin committed to a serious practice schedule, utilizing the strategy of *interleaving practice*. Unlike *blocked practice*, learning one skill at a time, *interleaving practice* involves working on multiple skills in parallel. Rather than hitting 100 drives from the range or 100 identical putts, McLaughlin is continually switching clubs and alternating targets. This is predicated on studies having shown that variety and mixing things up facilitates learning. It also raises the possibility that the number

of hours you put in may not be as important as how you use them. *Interleaving* has been shown to be effective in a number of studies involving motor learning as well as recall.

After five months of putting Dan received his second club, a pitching wedge. Just before the first anniversary of "The Dan Plan", he took his first full-swing lesson. On December 28, 2011 Dan played his first full round with a full set of clubs. At present, the would-be expert golfer currently is approaching the 3,800 hour mark, about 33 months since hitting that first 1-foot putt. Right now Dan's handicap is 5.8, placing him in the top 9% of the 26 million golfers in the U.S. Dan McLaughlin's story is a success story regardless of whether he wears the famous Masters green jacket one day or not.

Nowadays, instant gratification is the name of the game. If I can't have it within five minutes - don't bother. We're impatient in our material lives. And superficial. And this seeps through to our mitzvah observance as well. To achieve and create something meaningful and deep requires a substantial investment of time and diligence. Proverbs (12:24) says, "Work hard and become a leader; be lazy and never succeed." Talent is overrated. Stretching yourself beyond what you currently do will undoubtedly help you to achieve more.

Quote of the Week

Ninety-nine percent of all failures come from people who have a habit of making excuses. -- *George Washington Carver*

Joke of the Week

The Pope met with his Cardinals to discuss an offer. "Your Holiness," said one of his Cardinals, "Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu wants to challenge you to a game of golf to show the friendship of spirit shared by the Jewish and Catholic faiths." The Pope thought this was a good idea, but he had never held a golf club in his hand. "Don't we have a Cardinal to represent me?" he asked.

"None that plays very well," a Cardinal replied. "But," he added, "there is a man named Jack Nicklaus, an American golfer who is a devout Catholic. We can offer to make him a Cardinal, and then ask him to play Mr. Netanyahu as your personal representative. In addition to showing our spirit of cooperation, we'll also win the match."

Everyone agreed it was a good idea, and the call was made. Of course, Nicklaus was honored to be made a Cardinal, and agreed to play. The day after the match, Cardinal Nicklaus reported to the Vatican to inform the Pope of the result. "I have some good news and some bad news, your Holiness," said the golfer. "Tell me the good news first, Cardinal Nicklaus," said the Pope.

"Well, your Holiness, I played the round of my life. With all due respect, my play was truly miraculous." "And what's the bad news?" the Pope asked. Nicklaus sighed. "I lost to Rabbi Phil Mickelson."