

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Yisro January 18, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

It all started with a cheek swab. Cameron Lyle, a sophomore track and field student-athlete at the University of New Hampshire, was encouraged by a few friends to get his cheek swabbed for a National Marrow Donor program. The request took just five minutes and was forgotten by day's end. Fast forward to his senior season: Cameron was poised to take home the gold medal in the shot put at the conference championships to be held in May of 2013. Then he got a phone call. After practice, in the locker room, he was told there was a high possibility he could be a bone marrow match for a complete stranger. After additional testing, Lyle was confirmed as a definite match. There was no time to waste. The surgery was scheduled immediately for April 25. There was one catch: if Cameron chose to be a donor, his collegiate career would end without the championship for which he had worked so hard for so many years.

Even with that elusive gold medal in reach, Cameron never had any second thoughts about donating — especially when he learned about the man who would be receiving his marrow donation. Cameron's 28-year-old match was a blood cancer patient with a fiancé and a nineteen-month-old son. This information solidified his decision to donate. "I would have done it anyway," said Cameron. "But knowing he is just starting his life, he has so much ahead of him, makes it worth it. It hits home because he is only a few years older than I am."

Cameron's selfless choice led to incessant interview requests and awards -- including the 2013 NCAA's Award of Valor. The award recognizes a courageous act or noteworthy bravery associated with intercollegiate athletics. "I don't get it," said Cameron. "I view this whole thing as something anyone would do. It's not as huge as people are making it out to be. I guess it's just the type of person I am. After all the awards I've been getting, I keep asking, 'wouldn't anyone do the same thing?'"

The Talmud teaches that "Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world." Appreciation of the value and sanctity of human life can motivate us to reach out and help others in need -- like Cameron Lyle did in saving a man's life.

Parshas Yisro Exodus 18:1 -- 20:23

The weekly portion begins with Moses' father-in-law, Yisro, arriving at the Jewish people's camp in the desert, where he is greeted warmly by a large entourage. Yisro was inspired to join them when he heard about all of the wonders and miracles which G-d performed for the Jewish people during the Exodus from Egypt. Upon witnessing Moses serving as the people's sole judge from dawn until dusk, Yisro declares that this system will never work. He therefore suggests that subordinate judges be appointed to adjudicate the smaller cases. Moses agrees to this plan.

The Jewish people arrive at Mt. Sinai (the mountain, not the hospital) and prepare to receive the Torah. Moses ascends the mountain and G-d tells him to convey to the people that they will be to Him a treasure from among the nations. After three days of preparation, the appointed moment of revelation finally arrives. Amid thunder, lightning and the sound of the shofar, G-d descends upon the mountain and proclaims -- with the entire Jewish people listening -- the Ten Commandments. Referred to in Hebrew as the *Aseres HaDibros*, a more accurate translation would be the Ten Sayings or the Ten Statements. One noteworthy feature of the revelation is that both before and since Sinai, no nation has ever made the claim that G-d spoke to an entire nation of millions of individuals. Moses then ascends the mountain to receive the remainder of the Torah from G-d, both the written and oral segments. The portion concludes with several mitzvos concerning the construction of the altar in the Temple.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Do you know someone who is a nervous Nellie? A nervous Nellie is a person whose personality and usual behavior are characterized by worry, insecurity, and anxiety. Severe anxiety has a number of curious side-effects. As people get more anxious, they are more likely to label neutral smells as bad smells. So, anxiety literally makes the world stink. Professor Wen Li, co-author of a study examining the link between anxiety and smell, wrote, "In typical odor processing, it is usually just the olfactory system that gets activated. But when a person becomes anxious, the emotional system becomes part of the olfactory processing stream."

Additionally, people who experience more severe levels of anxiety also often have problems with their balance. They sometimes feel dizzy for no apparent reason and sway more than others while standing normally. This often starts in childhood and, because anxiety can be difficult to treat in children, psychologists have started trying to treat the balance problems. Studies have shown that treating the balance problem can help with the anxiety.

Most people experience anxiety on occasion, particularly in advance of certain activities such as public speaking. A study on anxiety-inducing activities discovered a fascinating counter-intuitive finding: Consciously trying to calm down isn't the best strategy in the face of something stressful. Instead, people who were instructed to say to themselves, "I am excited" before a stressful ordeal performed better.

Drugs may be prescribed for anxiety, but these are less effective in the long-term and have side-effects. Various methods of relaxation training are a more natural approach that may be helpful. A classic form of Jewish relaxation training is to develop faith and trust in G-d. Trusting in G-d is a constant choice; at any given moment, as difficulties swirl around us, we can say 'Gam zu l'tova -- This too, is for the best.' It was once said: 'Are you wrinkled with burden? Come to G-d for a faith lift.' In the words of Isaiah, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your G-d; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with the righteousness of My right hand." (40:10)

Quote of the Week

Procrastination seductively destroys our dreams more than any other controllable force -- **Rory Vaden**

Joke of the Week

98 year-old Reb Yankel was dying. The rabbis gathered around his bed trying to make his last journey comfortable. They gave him some warm milk to drink, but Reb Yankel refused. Then one of the rabbis took the glass back to the kitchen. Remembering a bottle of whiskey he received as a gift the previous Chanukah, that rabbi opened and poured a generous amount into the warm milk. Back at bedside, Reb Yankel held the glass to his lips. He drank a little, then a little more and before they knew it, Reb Yankel had drunk the whole glass down to the last drop.

"Reb Yankel," the rabbis asked with earnest, "please give us some wisdom before you die."

Reb Yankel raised himself up in bed and with a pious look on his face said, "Don't sell that cow."