

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Mishpatim January 25, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Lizzie Velasquez is one of only three people on Earth born with a rare genetic ailment which prevents her from gaining weight. She has never weighed more than 62 pounds, and was also born sightless in her right eye. When Lizzie was in high school, she discovered a video of herself on YouTube labeled "The World's Ugliest Woman." It had garnered millions of views. Lizzie's parents attempted to get the YouTube video taken off, but the unidentified figure who posted it professed he would never remove it. Instead of suffering from anger, hopelessness and depression, Lizzie decided to channel the hatred into motivation and to rise above the cruelty.

With the support of her family, Lizzie decided to begin by educating some high school freshmen about her rare disorder. She challenged the issue of bullying face-to-face and generated a schedule of dialogue arrangements. As a result of Lizzie's courage and disarming sense of humor, she has appeared on multiple television programs and produced three books, including "Be Beautiful, Be You." Lizzie speaks of how she resolved to take charge of her life by killing the negativity with ambition, and by defining herself on her own terms. She asks people to consider what defines them. Is it their backgrounds? Friends? Families? She reminds us that if we can find happiness within, and be the drivers of our own lives, the bullies will always lose. "I've had a really difficult life, but that's OK," she said. "I'm going to let my goals and my success and my accomplishments define me, not my outer appearance."

What is true beauty? Most often, when the Torah mentions a beautiful person, it is referring to a person whose outer appearance reflects their inner soul. For example, we are taught about the beauty of our matriarch Sarah. The Talmud says that Sarah was as beautiful at the age of 20 as a seven-year-old child. Yet isn't 20 closer to the ideal age of beauty than seven? The beauty of children is the beauty of purity of spirit; they act the way they feel without being influenced by insincerity. There are no put-ons or pretending. The secret of beauty does not lie in superficial cosmetics, but can be acquired only from within.

Parshas Mishpatim Exodus 21:1 -- 24:18

Following on the heels of the Ten Commandments, this week's Torah portion deals primarily with civil law. Like the realm of the ceremonial, our worldly and common activities must be infused with holiness and observed carefully. Included among the civil laws discussed in the portion are; penalties for causing bodily injury to another person and damaging his property; laws regarding borrowers; the mitzvah to show sensitivity to the poor and to offer them free loans; and laws relating to the honest dispensation of justice. After mentioning the mitzvos of Shabbos and *Shemittah* (the Sabbatical year), the portion continues with a brief discussion of the three pilgrimage festivals -- Passover, Shevuous and Sukkos.

The Torah then returns to the revelation at Mt. Sinai. The Jewish people declare their commitment to do whatever G-d commands with the famous phrase "Everything G-d has said, we will do and we will listen." The portion concludes with Moses' ascending the mountain, where he will remain for forty days and forty nights to receive the rest of the Torah.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Here's one good thing to say about liars: They are honest about their lying. A recent study conducted in Israel and Holland found that people who lie usually admit they do. "We asked (527) participants to report how many lies they told in the last 24 hours, a common way to assess self-reported dishonesty," explained team researcher Dr. Shaul Shalvi of Ben Gurion University. Participants were then given the opportunity to privately roll a dice and earn money based upon the outcome they reported rolling, with higher numbers earning greater profits.

On the survey portion of the examination, 41 percent of people who responded said they had not lied

throughout the course of the day while five percent of respondents were deemed accountable for around 40 percent of all the lies that were told. The majority of participants who admitted to lying came out of the dice test with more money. When researchers looked back over the data, they decided that the numbers they rolled to gain so much money were not the result of a series of lucky rolls, but more likely a result of lying.

According to Dr. Shalvi, there are practical applications to the study. "It is important to study the conditions leading people to lie, deceive, or engage in unethical conduct more broadly. Such behaviors are rather costly from a societal perspective. Consider, for example, behaviors like lying when filing an insurance claim, reporting that the TV that was stolen from one's apartment was just a couple inches larger than it really was. From the individual's perspective, this seems like a minor lie. Insurance companies, however, pay millions of dollars annually for such insurance 'build-ups'," he concludes.

Traditional Jewish sources emphasize the importance of teaching our children honesty. How can that best be done? By modeling the behavior we hope to see in our children. Do we call in sick to work when we're healthy and well? Do we tell 'white lies' to get out of a tight spot? If given too much change at a store, do we return it? *"And you shall teach them diligently to your children" (Deut. 6:7)* Teach your children all the words of the Torah - with an emphasis on living a life of honesty and integrity.

Quote of the Week

I marvel at the resilience of the Jewish people. Their best characteristic is their desire to remember. No other people has such an obsession with memory. -- *Elie Wiesel*

Joke of the Week

A customer walks into a restaurant and notices a large sign on the wall:

\$500 IF WE FAIL TO FILL YOUR ORDER!

When his waitress arrives, he orders elephant dung on rye. She calmly writes down his order and walks into the kitchen. But then, pandemonium erupts!

The restaurant owner comes storming out of the kitchen. He runs up to the customer's table, slaps five \$100 bills down on it and says:

"You got me with this one buddy, but I want you to know that's the first time in ten years we've been out of rye bread!"