

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason *Parshas Vayechi January 3, 2015*

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates ~

Two families are thanking G-d that they missed their bookings on doomed AirAsia flight QZ 8501 from Surabaya, Indonesia to Singapore, which lost contact with air traffic control over the Java Sea earlier this week. A sick family member saved the lives of Chandra Susanto, his wife and their three children. The Susanto family was booked on the plane to visit Mr. Susanto's father. "My father became ill so we had to cancel our flight," Chandra Susanto said. "It was a difficult decision to make because my son Christopher (age 10) was so disappointed. He had been looking forward to the holiday for a long time." The Susanto family learned they had narrowly averted disaster only when a terrified sister phoned to see if they were okay. "I am very thankful to G-d for his mercy for me and my family," the relieved father said. "But I am so sad and very sorry for the people on the plane. Our lives have changed. We are so grateful. We have an opportunity to be the best people we can and to help others. We are so thankful to G-d."

It was a missed email that spared Ari Putro Cahyono and nine of his family members. The Cahyono family had tickets on flight QZ 8501, which was originally set to take off at 7:30 A.M. local time. The departure time on the flight was rescheduled to 5:20 A.M., but Mr. Cahyono never read the email alerting him of the change. He and his family showed up at the airport at 5:30 A.M. – 10 minutes after the fateful flight took off. The upset family, unwilling to give up on a holiday in Singapore, was trying to negotiate a later flight when an airport official brought them the news of the flight they missed. "It was a miracle (from G-d) that happened to my family ..."

What blessings in your life should you thank G-d for?

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

Can mental power lead to muscle power? Research suggests that simply *imagining* exercising muscles can have a similar effect to hitting the gym. Although mental imagery has long been used in sports, a recent study published in the journal *Neurophysiology* (Clark et al., 2014) is the first to show that mental imagery can slow or even stop muscle loss resulting from inactivity. In the study, healthy people had their hands and wrists immobilized in a cast for four weeks. During this time one group did no exercise, while another imagined strong muscle contractions in their wrists. They did this for just 11 minutes, five times a week. The other group just sat still for the same amount of time. When the casts were removed, among those who did no mental exercise, muscle strength reduced by 45%, but among those who carried out the mental imagery, the loss of strength was only 24%

In a 2003 study, researchers at a Cleveland clinic showed that muscle strength can be improved by up to 35% with just mental imagery training (Ranganathan et al., 2003). Thirty young, healthy volunteers participated in the study. The first group was trained to perform "mental contractions" of a muscle in the little finger; the second group performed mental contractions of an elbow muscle; the third group was not trained but participated in all measurements and served as a control group. Finally, several volunteers performed physical training of a little finger muscle. At the end of training it was found that the 'mental

training' groups increased their muscle strength by an average of 24.25%, compared to a 53% increase for the physical training group. The control group showed no significant changes in strength for either finger or elbow measurements.

The Torah teaches that the mind is the seat of *chochmah*, wisdom. The Musar Movement, founded by Rabbi Yisrael Salanter in the middle of the nineteenth-century, encouraged the use of our mind for meditative practices of introspection and visualization that could help to improve moral character. Mentally rehearsing the way you would like to deal with difficult situations offers the prospect of creating behavior consonant with your goals and spiritual aspirations. If mental power can build muscle, it can certainly help to improve our character, and to create a closer relationship with the Almighty.

Quote of the Week

What we are is G-d's gift to us. What we become is our gift to G-d. -- *Eleanor Powell*

Joke of the Week

The High Holidays were finally over and the rabbi's wife dropped into an easy chair saying, "Boy, am I ever tired."

Her husband looked over at her and said, "I've lost count of the services and the number of sermons I had to deliver. Why are you so tired?"

"Dear," she replied, "I had to listen to all of them."