

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Matos-Masei July 18, 2015

“Will the Real Elizabeth Gallagher Please Stand UP?”

Jordan Axani, 28, of Toronto, and his then girlfriend, named Elizabeth Gallagher, booked heavily discounted round-the-world air tickets in May 2014. When their relationship ended shortly thereafter, Jordan didn't want her ticket to go to waste. The ticket had a strict no-transfer policy, but since passport information was not required when booking, it could be used by any Canadian named Elizabeth Gallagher. So Jordan posted an offer for an 'Elizabeth Gallagher' in November on a social media website, and received 18 emails from actual Elizabeth Gallaghers with Canadian passports. His travel-mate choice: Elizabeth Quinn Gallagher, a 23-year-old student and part-time office administrator from Nova Scotia. Jordan promised to be on his best behavior with the new Elizabeth Gallagher. "It's strictly a platonic trip. It's going to be great," he said.

When the story became public, Marriott International offered to put Jordan and Elizabeth up in separate rooms during their trip. How was the trip? In January, Jordan and the woman with his former girlfriend's name returned from their whirlwind trip, which he called "a life changing experience." In three weeks, the pair traveled to Milan, Vienna, Prague, Paris, southern Thailand, Bangkok then Delhi, India, and Hong Kong before returning to North America. "While traveling with a complete stranger may seem like an odd idea to many, (Elizabeth) Quinn and I had an incredible experience on our trip around the world," Jordan said. The two say there wasn't any romance on the trip, but they plan to stay in touch. A headline in the Toronto Star read, "Elizabeth Gallagher back in boyfriend's arms after round-the-world trip."

Anna Smashnova was a professional Israeli tennis player, Layne Beachley is a seven-time champion surfer, Derek Kickett was an Australian Rules footballer, Stephen Rowbotham was an Olympic rower for Britain, and Usain Bolt is the fastest man in the world. The Talmud says that parents receive a glimmer of divine inspiration when they give their child a Jewish name. What's in a name? Plenty! Just ask Elizabeth Gallagher.

Parshas Matos -- Masei Numbers 30:2 - 36:13

In the first of this week's two action-packed portions, Moses teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows. Promises are serious business. When we say that we plan to do something -- even something as simple as, 'I'll call you later' -- we're bound by our words. Anticipating entrance into the land of Israel, the tribes of Gad and Reuben petition Moses to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan River because that land is particularly suitable for grazing their cattle. Moses, not wanting to 'steer' Gad and Reuben wrong, grants their request on the condition that they first help the rest of the nation in conquering the entire land of Israel before returning to settle their inheritance.

Masei (a word that means 'journeys') begins with a listing of the 42 encampments of the Jewish people's 40 year journey from the Exodus until the crossing of the Jordan River into the Land of Israel. The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined. Since the Levites would not be receiving a regular portion of the land, 48 cities are set aside for them. Cities of refuge are established; one who unintentionally murders can flee there. So ends the book of Numbers, the fourth of the Books of the Torah. Next week -- on to Deuteronomy!

Rabbinic Ruminations

A thief struck by misfortune since stealing two artifacts 20 years ago has returned them along with an appeal to others to refrain from plundering antiquities, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) said Monday. A typed note attached to the bag by an anonymous individual read: "These are two Roman ballista balls from Gamla I stole them in July 1995 and since then they have brought me nothing but trouble. Please, do not steal antiquities!" Dr. Danny Syon of the IAA, said, "Almost 2,000 such stones were found during the archaeological excavations in the Gamla Nature Reserve The Romans shot these stones at the defenders of the city in order to keep them away from the wall, and in that way they could

approach the wall and break it with a battering ram. The stones were manually chiseled on site by soldiers or prisoners," he explained.

This is not the first time antiquities robbers in Israel have shown remorse for their theft or unauthorized possession of artifacts. In the past, a 2,000 year old Jewish coffin was returned to the Unit for the Prevention of Antiquities Robbery. It had been kept in the bedroom of a Tel Aviv resident until he realized the morbid meaning of the find. In another case, a Christian clergyman from the state of New York asked for forgiveness for a member of his congregation whose conscience was tormented by the fact he took a stone from Jerusalem more than a decade earlier. The stone was returned to the National Treasures. He wrote, "The fellow confessed to me that twelve years ago he took a stone from Jerusalem and his conscience has bothered him ever since. I wish to return the stone to Israel and hope that you will forgive the man for his transgression."

There are consequences to our actions, both as individuals and as communities. The Torah is clear that G-d interacts with humanity using the principle of *middah ke-neged middah* -- measure-for-measure. Or as people say 'What goes around, comes around.' But there's good news: It's never too late to seek forgiveness. The door remains open to rectify our mistakes -- be they having improperly treated another person, or pocketing an antiquity.

Quote of the Week

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire -- **William Butler Yeats**, Irish Poet, 1865-1939

Joke of the Week

During a "Generation Gap" argument with his parents, 17 year-old Michael cried out, "I want excitement, adventure, money, and attractive women. I'll never find those here at home, so I'm leaving. Don't try to stop me!"

With that, he headed toward the door. His father rose and followed close behind.

"Dad, didn't you hear what I said? Please don't try to stop me."

"Who's trying to stop you?" replied the father. "I'm going with you!"