

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Matos July 18, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

A seven-year-old Canadian boy believes in the adage, "When life hands you lemons ...make lemonade." Seven-year-olds Quinn Callander and Brayden Grozdanich, from Vancouver, have been best buddies since kindergarten. Brayden suffers from cerebral palsy and has very painful daily physiotherapy to help him walk. Needing a \$20,000 operation that could see him walking without braces, Quinn was distressed to learn that Brayden's family couldn't afford the surgery which is only available in America. So Quinn decided to help.

"When I got home, I wanted to tell my mummy and daddy that I wanted to do a lemonade stand to help raise money to help him," Quinn said. The adorable duo set up an old-school lemonade stand on the street and wore matching blue shirts that said, "When life hands you lemons ... make lemonade". Quinn's mother also helped him start an online fundraising campaign for Brayden, which has raised over \$50,000. The two families have thanked all supporters for their kindness and generosity. "We are humbled by the generosity of others and our hearts are full," they wrote. "All funds raised past our goal will go to help the family with travel expenses and physiotherapy. Thank you again, you are amazing!"

There is no life that is not fraught with hardships and frustration, nor is there any important period in a person's life that passes without adversity. However, a bend in the road isn't the end of the road -- particularly if you have a friend to accompany you through the twists and turns of the journey. Ethics of the Fathers says "... *acquire for yourself a friend ..*" (1:6). Friends like Quinn Callander are the best 'purchase' you'll ever make.

Parshas Matos Numbers 30:2 - 32:42

Moses (*Moshe*) 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. The Jewish people go to war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all of the males, and Bilaam. Moses is upset that women were taken as captives, because they were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moses that there was not one casualty among the B'nei Yisrael. In anticipation of entering 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.

The Tribes of Gad and Reuben, who own large quantities of livestock, petition *Moshe* to remain where they are and not traverse the Jordan River into Israel. They explain that the land where they are presently located is quite suitable as grazing land for their livestock. *Moshe's* initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of the B'nei Yisrael, and is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure *Moshe* that they will first help B'nei Yisrael wage war and conquer Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. *Moshe* grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

Rabbinic Ruminations

After a hunting trip in the Alps in 1941, Swiss engineer George de Mestral's dog was covered in burdock burrs -- the sticky seed heads of burdock plants. Mestral put one under his microscope and saw that the seeds had little hooks that would attach themselves to anything passing by to aid in seed dispersal. He realized that the same mechanism could be used to join other things together. This observation led him to invent the product now called Velcro. Biomimicry -- a term popularized by scientist and author Janine Benyus in her 1997 book *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature* -- is the imitation of the models, systems, and elements of nature for the purpose of solving complex human problems.

One of the early examples of biomimicry was the study of birds to enable human flight. Although never successful in creating a "flying machine", Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) was a keen observer of the anatomy and flight of birds, and made numerous notes and sketches on his observations as well sketches of "flying machines". The Wright Brothers, who succeeded in flying the first heavier-than-air aircraft in 1903, derived inspiration from observations of pigeons in flight. Frank Fish, biology professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania, theorized that the swimming prowess of humpback whales comes from a row of warty ridges, called tubercles, on the front edge of their fins. The aptly named Professor Fish, who first noticed the 'whale bumps' on a whale statue in a Boston gift shop, applied the idea to turbine blades. By adding rows of similar bumps to turbine blades he could reduce drag and noise, increase speed to changing wind direction and boost the power harnessed by 20 percent. The bumps are now being sold on industrial fans and on surfboards.

The Midrash relates that King David said to G-d, "Creator of the Universe, for what reason did you create these creatures when You made the world? The wasp gives no honey, is destructive, and gives no benefit. The spider weaves her web all year long, but we can make no garments out of her cobwebs." G-d answered him, "David, do you mock My creatures? A time will come when you need them and you will know why they were created." As King Solomon later said -- perhaps foreshadowing the discipline of biomimicry -- "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven." (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Quote of the Week

There's no reason to be the richest man in the cemetery. You can't do any business from there. --
Colonel Harlan Sanders

Joke of the Week

An older man in Miami calls his son in New York and says, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing. Forty-five years of misery is enough."

"Pop, what are you talking about?" the son screams.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old man says. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her," and he hangs up.

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorced," she shouts. "I'll take care of this."

She calls her father immediately and says, "You are NOT getting divorced! Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?" and hangs up.

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "It worked!" he says. "They're coming for Pesach and paying their own airfare!"