

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Devarim July 25, 2015

“Brendan’s Mystery Tipper!”

A slow night at an Illinois restaurant turned out to be full of surprises for one 19-year-old waiter. Brendan Motil had been chatting with a customer about life at the Smokey Barque BBQ in Frankfort, where he had just recently started to work. The customer apparently appreciated the service. Though the bill was \$20.31, Brendan's jaw dropped when he saw the tip the man had left behind -- a staggering \$1,000. "I was in shock," the teenager said. "I tried to go out there and he was gone."

In a note written on the back of the receipt, the mystery tipper wrote, "Thanks for your kind service! You're doing a great job as a server. I'm not sure what your hopes and dreams are in this life, but I hope this tip helps." He went on to add, "My hope is that people [are] more peaceful to each other. The world can be so negative and violent, [so] I commit random acts of kindness to let others know there can be another way. Peace be with you brother." Brendan said he will use the money for college, where he plans to pursue a career in accounting.

In Ethics of the Fathers (2:13) Rabbi Elazar ben Arach stated that having a *lev tov* -- a good heart -- is the best character trait a person can have. A good heart is reflected by how we treat others. At times in this world, kindness seems to be in short supply. Acts of kindness -- like that of Brendan Motil's mystery tipper -- reflect the compassion and kindness of the Almighty.

Parshas Devarim -- Deuteronomy 1:1 - 3:11

This week we begin the fifth and final book of the Torah, Deuteronomy. This book is also called Mishna Torah, "Repetition of the Torah" - thus the Greek title 'Deuteronomy.' Its contents were spoken by Moses to the Jewish people during the final five weeks of his life as the people prepared to cross the Jordan River into the land of Israel. A central theme of Deuteronomy is Moses' review of the mitzvos, and his emphasis on the change of lifestyle the Jewish people were to undergo. The transition was to be made from a supernatural existence in the desert to a natural life to be experienced in the Land of Israel. The portion begins with Moses' veiled rebuke in which he makes reference to the many sins and rebellions of the past forty years. Moses spends significant time discussing the failed mission of the spies; ten of the twelve men sent to scout out the land returned with a bad report, resulting in the entire nation wandering in the desert for forty years. Moses later discusses the Children of Israel's conquest on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. This Torah portion concludes with words of encouragement for Moses' successor, Joshua.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Is the road to success a sprint -- or a marathon? The idea of overnight success may be a prevalent cultural myth that keeps us from understanding that success is less of a quick hit and more of a long haul. All too often we may attribute the success of people to their natural ability, or think of their good fortune as an extension of a "G-d-given" talent or luck. But many believe that in doing so, we are gravely underestimating the role of good old-fashioned hard work.

In his book *The Dip*, Seth Godin writes, "We are seduced by the tales of actresses being discovered at the local drugstore, or a classmate who got a fantastic job just by showing up at the college placement office. We see an author hit the big time after just one appearance on Oprah or a rock band getting signed after submitting a demo—it all seems easy and exciting." Tory Burch, founder of the [Tory Burch Foundation](#), an organization dedicated to the economic empowerment of women and families, addressed the myth of the overnight success in her outstanding speech to the graduates at Babson College this past June. After appearing on Oprah in 2004, her website received over eight million hits and the media labeled her an overnight success. As she observes with a hint of irony, "I guess that made sense—if you didn't count the 20,000 hours we put into building the business up to that day, or the combined half a million hours we all spent learning the industry in the years before that."

The Jewish approach to achievement is represented by our calendar that follows the moon, a radiating orb that continuously waxes and wanes. When the moon is full, we can see its full brightness. But for half the month the light decreases until it disappears completely, and the only way to walk forward is through commitment and courage. Real success occurs in a winding maze that we have to light up through determination and perseverance. As King Solomon tells us, "A *tzaddik* (righteous person) falls seven times, and gets up" (Proverbs, 24:16). He's not great in spite of his falling; he is great because of his falling.

Quote of the Week

Money is a great servant but a bad master. — *Francis Bacon*

Joke of the Week

Saturday night (July 25) begins the observance of Tisha B'Av, the Jewish National Day of Mourning. Tisha B'Av is a full 24 hour fast, similar in that respect to Yom Kippur. Tisha B'Av is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar, commemorating the multiple tragedies that occurred to the Jewish people throughout our long history. Remarkably, the destruction of the first and second Holy Temples took place on Tisha B'Av itself. Tisha B'Av is preceded by the sad and introspective period known as 'The 9 Days'. During these days we minimize joy and laughter to better focus on the meaning of this period of time.

I have a great Joke of the Week to share with you . . . but in deference to the solemnity of the 9 Days and Tisha B'Av, I'll save it for next week