

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*  
*Parshas Chukas June 27, 2015*

*“(Arm) Wrestling With Life’s Challenges”*

When Matthias Schlitte was 16 years old, he began competing in arm wrestling competitions after his mother spotted a flyer at a gas station looking for male arm wrestlers up to 198 lbs. When he arrived, he got plenty of looks and laughs; after all, at 140 pounds, Matthias was much smaller than his fellow competitors. Then the arm wrestling started. “All these bigger men were laughing at me, but when I beat them all the men changed from laughing to respect and the rest is history.” The young German was born with a rare genetic defect that makes his right forearm bone 33 percent larger than his left. “I first discovered I could use my gift when I was three years of age. We had a family oven at home and I picked up a rather large bucket of coal and carried it around, which was probably very uncommon for a three-year-old.” This left Matthias with an enormous limb that looks strikingly like Popeye’s -- and gave him an instant advantage in the sport he suddenly found himself loving.

Now 27 years old and a decade into his professional arm wrestling career, Matthias is a German and international champion many times over. He has earned eight German national championships, 14 international championships, and even beat a specially designed arm wrestling robot. With a right forearm that measures 18 inches around, Matthias has become a huge success -- and to top it off, the young arm wrestler has a great sense of humor about his unusual arm. He’s been featured in comedic commercials (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ts2Zb8VHpA&feature=youtu.be> a Must-see!) for playing up his supersized strength. Matthias also has a wise life-perspective: “Everyone has a challenge in life,” he said. “I’m not a religious guy or anything but this was a gift from a Higher Power and this was my calling in life.”

Can something that seems bad be something good in disguise? Absolutely. It is important to train oneself to look positively upon life's situations. Often what appears as 'bad' or 'negative' ends up being a blessing. What can we do to look at challenging situations in a positive light? A Hebrew expression, *gam zu l'tova*, means 'this too is for the best.' When things don't seem to be going your way, say *gam zu l'tova*. At times, a hidden blessing and 'good mistake' -- such as an abnormally oversized arm -- turns out to be the sweetest blessing of all.

*Parshas Chukas Numbers 19:1 - 22:1*

This week's action-packed portion begins with the paradox of the Red Heifer, a mitzvah we are asked to perform though unable to understand its purpose and reason. The narrative jumps to the death of the prophetess Miriam. The Jewish people are then left without water, since the miraculous well which had accompanied them in the desert existed only in her merit. G-d commands Moses and Aaron to speak to a particular rock so it will miraculously produce water; Moses strikes it with his staff instead, and G-d tells the two leaders they will not enter the Promised Land. What did Moses do wrong? One classic approach suggests that Moses' sin was that he became angry (he said to the Jewish people, 'Listen now, you rebels'). Although the best among us can occasionally lose our temper, teachers and parents carry a special responsibility to be good role models for their students and children. Little pitchers have big ears! Later in the portion, the king of Edom refuses to let the Jewish people pass through his borders, causing them to take a longer route. Aaron dies and is buried on Mount Hor. The Children of Israel sing a song of praise about the well of Miriam. The portion concludes with the battles and victories over Sichon, the king of Emori, and Og, the king of Bashan.

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

No time to exercise? Too busy focusing on your career? We've all used that excuse, but now there's evidence that if you feel like you've found your life's purpose, your risk of heart disease is lower. According to a new study, having a high sense of purpose in life is related to a 23% lower risk of death due for all causes, as well as a 19% lower risk of suffering from heart attack. A research team analyzed data from 10 different studies that included a total of over 137,000 participants and defined the concept of “having a purpose in life” as “having a sense of meaning and direction,” as well as “the feeling that life

is worth living.” The study’s lead author, Dr. Randy Cohen, said: “Our study shows there is a strong relationship between having a sense of purpose in life and protection from dying or having a cardiovascular event. As part of our overall health, each of us needs to ask ourselves the critical question of ‘do I have a sense of purpose in my life?’ The findings were recently presented at the EPI/Lifestyle 2015 Scientific Sessions of the American Heart Association in Baltimore.

This is not the first study to link a sense of purpose with both physical and psychological benefits:

- A 2009 study of 1,238 elderly people found that those with a sense of purpose lived longer.
- A 2010 study of 900 older adults found that those with a greater sense of purpose were much less likely to develop Alzheimer’s disease.
- Survey data often links a sense of purpose in life with increased happiness.

Despite the fact that previous studies already connected life purpose to psychological health and well-being, this is the first time that a correlation with heart conditions has been established.

Writer Dorothy Parker once sent a telegram to a friend who had a baby: *Congratulations, we all knew you had it in you. We're all designed for greatness -- because we've all 'got it in us.'* And the one-way ticket to accomplish greatness is to use that talent we were given at birth. G-d expects a return on His investment, as the Torah says, *"...the wise-hearted people whom I have invested with... wisdom."* (Exodus 28:3) When you use what you've been given, you're immediately beginning to pay interest on the investment. And then watch how much more you get entrusted with. If you feel like your life fulfills you, there's an additional bonus: You can rest easy knowing that you're doing your heart a favor.

### *Quote of the Week*

The moment we want to believe something, we suddenly see all the arguments for it, and become blind to the arguments against it. -- *George Bernard Shaw*

### **Joke of the Week**

A young man had just graduated from Harvard and was so excited just thinking about his future.

He got into a taxi and the driver said, "How are you on this wonderful day?"

"I'm the Class of 2014, just graduated from Harvard and I just can't wait to go out there and see what the world has in store for me."

The driver looked back to shake the young man's hand and said, "Congratulations, I'm Mitch. Harvard Class of 1995."