

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Beha'aloscha June 6, 2015*

“The Shabbat Vaedictorian!”

Senior Don Greenberg was looking forward to addressing his fellow students as a commencement speaker at Binghamton University's engineering school when his girlfriend broke the bad news: May 16, graduation day, fell on a Saturday. A triple major from Teaneck, N.J., with a 3.93 GPA, Don is *Shomer Shabbos*; fully observant of the Sabbath. What was the 'bad news'? Speaking into the microphone on the podium would have been a violation of Shabbat. But all's well that ends well! Don pre-recorded his speech, which was then shown on jumbo screens onstage on his graduation day, with him standing quietly on the stage, watching along with his fellow graduates, University faculty, family and friends. The only addition to the speech he had originally intended to give was a brief prologue which explained the reason for this unusual manner of delivery.

According to attendees at the commencement ceremony, Don's speech was well received. People appeared to understand the reasons behind the pre-recorded address, and were able to focus on his graduation message. Katharine Ellis, senior director of communications and a speech coach to the university's student commencement speakers, said she knew little about Orthodox Jewish practice until she met Don. But she said Binghamton was determined to do what it could to allow him to accept the honor he had earned. "Shabbat's restrictions may be limiting for many people," she said. "But it's freeing for him."

For those who observe Shabbat, it is a day of great joy eagerly awaited throughout the week, a time when we can set aside our weekday concerns and devote ourselves to higher pursuits. In Jewish literature, poetry and music, Shabbos is described as a bride or queen, as in the popular Shabbat hymn *Lecha Dodi*. It is said "more than Israel has kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept Israel." Shabbos: our source of strength, vision, and freedom.

Parshas Beha'aloscha Numbers 8:1 - 12:16

Beha'aloscha (Hebrew for "when you step up") is thematically diverse, beginning with the daily lighting of the golden menorah in the Mishkan. The Levites are initiated into the Tabernacle service. The Torah then describes the celebration of Passover in the second year in the desert, complete with the bringing of the *Korban Pesach* (Passover offering). Some men could not bring the offering due to ritual impurity, and were thus commanded to celebrate *Pesach Sheni*, a 'make-up Passover' a month later. Lesson: Second chances are available. Additionally, the standard procedure by which the Jewish people would break camp to travel in the desert is described. Soon after leaving Mt. Sinai, the people begin to kvetch. Spurred by the mixed multitude of insincere converts who joined the Jewish people upon leaving Egypt, the complaining is directed toward the manna, their daily miraculous portion of heavenly bread. G-d sends a massive flock of quail which the people gather to eat; those who had complained about the lack of food overstuff themselves and die during this supernatural event. The portion concludes with Miriam speaking *loshon hara* (defamatory words) to Aaron about their brother Moses. She is punished by G-d with *tzaraas* (a skin condition indicating a spiritual deficiency) and is quarantined outside the camp for seven days.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Students in Hayley Dupuy's sixth-grade science class at the Jane Lathrop Stanford Middle School in Palo Alto, California, were beginning a unit on plate tectonics. In small groups, they produced their own questions, quickly, one after another: What are plate tectonics? How fast do plates move? Why do plates move? Do plates affect temperature? What animals can sense the plates moving? They raise questions "that we never would have thought of if we started to answer the first question we asked," said one of the students. "And just when you think you already know the question you want to focus on, you realize: 'Oh, wow, here's this other question that is so much better, and that's really what you need to think about.'" Research shows the benefits of formulating the right questions. The authors of the book *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions* wrote, "When students know how to ask their own questions, they take greater ownership of their learning, deepen comprehension, and make new

connections and discoveries on their own." Asking good questions is important in school and beyond. Since the passing of Steve Jobs more than three years ago, books have been written and movies made celebrating his legacy and aiming to share the secrets he used to build the largest company in the world. Many suggest it was Jobs' insatiable curiosity that may have been his most important quality. Jim Collins, author of the best seller *Good to Great*, described Peter Drucker (aka "the man who invented management") as someone "who had a remarkable ability to not just to give the right answers but more important, to ask the right questions -- questions that would shift our entire frame of reference."

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, the American psychiatrist, remembers how, when he was young, his teacher would welcome questions, the more demanding the better. When faced with a particularly tough challenge, he would say, in his broken English: "*You right! You hundred prozent right! Now I show you where you wrong.*" The Nobel prize-winning Jewish physicist Isidore Rabi once explained that his mother taught him how to be a scientist. 'Every other child would come back from school and be asked, "What did you learn today?" But my mother used to ask, instead, "Izzy, did you ask a good question today?"' In the yeshiva, the home of traditional Talmudic learning, the highest compliment a teacher can give a student is *Du fregst a gutte kasha*, 'You raise a good objection.' Good questions help us to re-think what we think we know.

Quote of the Week

Courage is being scared to death... and saddling up anyway. -- **John Wayne**

Joke of the Week

Lost on a rainy night, a rabbi stumbles into a monastery.

"Welcome, Rabbi! You're just in time for dinner!"

"Thank you so much, but I can't eat meat that isn't kosher."

"We have excellent fish 'n chips."

"Oh, wonderful."

They eat.

"Say, these are the best fish n' chips I've ever tasted. May I thank the chef?"

"Certainly. Brother Michael and Brother Francis, please come in!"

"Very pleased to meet you, gentlemen. I just wanted to thank you for the finest fish and chips I've ever had. Just out of curiosity, who cooked what?"

Brother Michael replied, "Well, I'm the fish friar."

The rabbi turns to the other brother and says, "Then you must be...."

"Yes, I'm afraid I'm the chip monk."