

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Vayikra March 7, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Shake a leg is an idiomatic expression meaning 'hurry up', as in 'Shake a leg, we'll miss the plane!' Walter Williams, of Lexington, Mississippi, gave new meaning to the phrase on Feb. 28, when he 'shook a leg' -- and saved his own life. The 78-year-old farmer was pronounced dead after being found without a pulse. Family members said their good-byes to Walter "Snowball" Williams and watched as the coroner zipped him into a body bag. With morticians getting ready to begin the embalming process at the funeral home, Mr. Williams kicked his legs inside the body bag, seemingly coming back from the dead.

It's difficult to imagine the panic that Mr. Williams must have felt waking up in a body bag -- or the experience of the funeral home employees as they watched a body kicking inside a body bag. How was "Snowball" Williams declared dead when he was still alive? Dexter Howard, Holmes County Coroner, surmised that the man's pacemaker had stopped working, rendering him a man without a pulse and meeting the criteria for death. Once he was pronounced dead and taken away, he believes Mr. Williams pacemaker started working again, literally bringing him back to life. Mr. Williams has told his family members he is happy to be alive today. While he was a sick man to begin with and he was under medical care at the time he was mistakenly pronounced dead, it just wasn't his time to go.

Dale Carnegie said, "Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all." Though things may appear bleak, there is always reason to hope. Faith and trust in G-d mean we never stop believing there exist options -- if only, to turn to our Father in heaven for help and salvation. In the words of the Talmud, "Even if a sharp sword is placed against the neck of a person, he should not abandon hope for mercy."

Parshas Vayikra 1:1 -- 5:26

This Shabbos marks the beginning of our reading the third book of the Torah, Sefer Vayikra which deals primarily with the services and responsibilities of the Kohanim. This week's portion focuses on many of the *korbanos* (offerings) to be brought in the newly-constructed Mishkan. Parshas Vayikra begins with G-d calling Moses into the Mishkan where he will receive the many relevant mitzvos to be ultimately passed on to the Jewish people. The first half of the Torah portion describes the various optional *korbanos* brought by individuals. They can be classified into three general categories, each one comprised of several gradations in size and expense; the *korban olah* (elevation offering) which is completely consumed on the altar; the *korban mincha* (meal offering) which, because of its inexpensive contents, is usually brought by someone of modest means; and the *korban shelamim* (peace offering) partially burned on the altar, with the remainder divided between the owners and the Kohanim. The second half of the portion (beginning with chapter four) discusses the required *chatos* (sin) and *asham* (guilt) offerings to be brought as atonement for unintentional transgressions.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Music is a splendid thing. It can cheer you when you're sad, make you dance like a fool, and stir your creative juices. But music has its scientific uses, too. "Music imprints itself on the brain deeper than any other human experience," says neurologist Oliver Sacks. Here's a look at some things music has been known to "cure":

Low Birth Weight: Babies born too early often require extended stays in the hospital to help them gain weight and strength. A team of Canadian researchers found that playing music to preemies reduced their pain levels and encouraged better feeding habits, which in turn helped with weight-gain.

Droopy Plants: Music helps babies grow, and can do the same thing for plants. A 1973 book called *The Sound of Music and Plants* detailed the effects of music on plant growth. At the end of a study, 'easy listening' plants were uniform in size, full and green, and were even leaning toward the source of the

music. Plants exposed to rock music were droopy, with faded leaves, and were leaning away from the radio.

Teen Loitering: Public libraries, malls, and train stations already know this: Teenagers typically don't like classical music. In fact, they dislike it so much that "it sends them scurrying away like frightened mice," says the *LA Times*. The theory is that when the brain hears something it dislikes, it suppresses dopamine, "the pleasure chemical." And as teenagers' moods fall, they go elsewhere to find something to bring it back up.

Illiteracy: A 2009 study comparing two groups of second graders from similar demographics suggests learning music boosts reading abilities. The only major difference between the two groups was that one learned music notation, sight-reading and other skills, while the control group did not. The kids with a music education scored "significantly higher", especially on vocabulary tests.

King David referred to the study of Torah as music: *Your statutes have been my songs wherever I dwell.* (Psalm 119:54) To make Judaism come alive, don't just 'do' it; let it sing!

Quote of the Week

A man without a smiling face must not open a shop. - *Chinese Proverb*

Joke of the Week

A group of managers were given the assignment to measure the height of a flagpole.

So they go out to the flagpole with ladders and tape measures, and they're falling off the ladders, dropping the tape measures--the whole thing is just a mess.

An engineer comes along and sees what they're trying to do, walks over, pulls the flagpole out of the ground, lays it flat, measures it from end to end, gives the measurement to one of the managers and walks away.

After the engineer has gone, one manager turns to another and laughs. "Isn't that just like an engineer, we're looking for the height and he gives us the length."