

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Naso May 30, 2015

"What Your Facebook Updates Tell Others About You!"

Feeling old today? You could be Jonathan the Tortoise, a big and friendly guy estimated to be around 182-years old. Jonathan, a Seychelles giant tortoise, was alive to see many monumental moments including, WWI and WWII, plus so much more. What does Jonathan do on his birthday? He . . . shellebrates! One can see a photo from 1902 in which Jonathan is a full grown tortoise, meaning he was at least 50 years old at the time (see Jonathan's then and now photos: <http://www.ryot.org/jonathan-the-tortoise-182-years-old/776945>). His possible age was realized when this photograph was uncovered from a collection of Boer War images showing a tortoise -- presumably Jonathan -- next to a war prisoner. Research indicates Jonathan was brought to the island of St. Helena in 1882, where he still lives today. The Saint Helena five pence coin has Jonathan on its reverse.

Jonathan is still going strong, but he feels the effects of aging. His sense of smell has started go, along with his eyesight. Surprisingly though, Jonathan remains interested in the youngest female tortoise he lives with -- a sign, the famous tortoise's vet says -- of more healthy years to come. Age-related declines in Jonathan have been noticed: Jonathan gets colder than the other tortoises, and he is thinner and harder to keep weight on because he doesn't eat as much grass as he should. The vet compensates for this by feeding Jonathan a special meal with higher calories once a week.

The Torah teaches us to value time. We ask G-d, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12) Every moment a person can do good, perfect his character, and make the world a better place. Many of us live our lives as if we will live forever, putting off even important things for another day. And although Jonathan the 182 year-old tortoise can't talk, if you asked him he might agree: Every moment of life is precious.

Parshas Naso Numbers 4:21 - 7: 89

Among the topics appearing in *Naso* is the mitzvah of the 'Sotah'. When compelling circumstantial evidence suggests an act of marital infidelity may have taken place, the Torah provides a means to clarify the hoped-for innocence of the suspect parties. Contained in this mitzvah is dissolving G-d's name that was written on a parchment. We learn from this the supreme importance of *shalom bayis* -- peace in the home. If G-d allows His Holy Name to be erased for the sake of peace between husband and wife, certainly each of us should seek *shalom bayis* with our spouses and other family members. What can each of us do to increase *shalom bayis* with those whom we love? *Parshas Naso* also describes the *nazir* -- an individual who takes a vow to refrain from drinking wine, cutting his hair, and other restrictions. Remember the story of Samson? Samson -- who was a *nazir* -- was the great Jewish judge and hero who 'brought down the house.'

Rabbinic Ruminations

If Facebook were a country, its population would rival the single most populous country on Earth. In September, 2014, the site announced that its monthly active users cleared 1.35 billion -- roughly equal the population of China. . By these numbers, nearly 20 percent of the world's population logs into Facebook once a month. And if we just look at the world's Internet users, roughly half of them -- every other person with Internet *on the planet* -- use the site actively. Status updates are one of the most popular features of Facebook, and a new study (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886915003025>) examined the traits and motives that influence the topics that people choose to update.

One interesting finding of the study showed that people habitually posting to Facebook about exercise, diets and accomplishments are more likely to be narcissists. Given that bragging about accomplishments tends to attract more attention from friends, one might surmise that increased likes and comments to the narcissist's status updates mean that the narcissist has more 'friends' -- well, at least more 'Facebook friends.' However, the study's first author, Dr. Tara Marshall, said in reference to the increased attention narcissists elicit: ". . . it could be that their Facebook friends politely offer support while secretly disliking

such egotistical displays. Greater awareness of how one's status updates might be perceived by friends could help people to avoid topics that annoy more than they entertain."

Jackie Robinson said, "A life isn't significant except for its impact on other lives." Judaism is intensely aware of the impact we can have upon others through our power of speech -- even in written 'Facebook' form. The Talmud tells that the tongue is an instrument so dangerous that it must be kept hidden from view, behind two protective walls (the mouth and teeth) to prevent its misuse. King David asks, "Which man desires life, who loves days of seeing good?" He answers, "Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit" (Psalms 34:13-14).

Quote of the Week

You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist. -- *Indira Gandhi*

Joke of the Week

The college faculty gathered for their weekly meeting. A professor of archeology brought with him a lamp recently unearthed in the Middle East. It was reported to contain a genie, who, when the lamp was rubbed would appear and grant one wish.

A professor of philosophy was particularly intrigued. He grabbed the lamp and rubbed it vigorously. Suddenly a genie appeared and made him an offer. He could choose one of three rewards: wealth, wisdom, or beauty. Without hesitating, the philosophy professor selected wisdom. "Done!" said the genie and disappeared in a cloud of smoke.

All the other faculty members turned toward the professor, who sat surrounded by a halo of light. One of his colleagues whispered, "What wise insight do you now have?"

The professor, much wiser now, sighed and said, "I should have taken the money."