

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Chayei Sarah November 15, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates ~

In November 2013, a London restaurant opened under the proprietorship of Ben and Ed Robson. Named *Boopshi's*, the eatery owes its existence — and its menu — to the brothers' grandparents, Fred and Nora Robson. "They were a big part of our lives," says Ben Robson. "We used to go to their house every weekend and help them make food. Schnitzel was our favorite and something we demanded every week." Growing up, Ben and Ed knew that their grandparents had emigrated to the UK from Austria, in 1937. They'd changed their names when they arrived. But that was about all they knew. Ben said, "They never talked about the past too much. That was that and nothing more was said." But the brothers found out a lot more after both had passed away.

Ben Robson said, "We went through a whole box of information that had photos, birth certificates, everything . . . and what we found out was that both sides of the family were in fact Jewish, which was a surprise." Fred Robson had been born Fritz Rosenzweig, but, from 1937 on, he and Nora had gone to great lengths to hide their Jewishness. "My dad was brought up Christian. I mean, they didn't go to church or anything like that. But I think they moved to London and they just had this absolute fear of anything like [the Holocaust] happening ever again. So they went the complete opposite and never talked about, never mentioned it or anything," said Ben.

Also in that box of history: Recipe books belonging to Fred. "Just a wealth of recipes, both Viennese, and English," Ben added. The discovery of the recipe books was "a light bulb moment" for brothers Ed and Ben and the idea of *Boopshi's* restaurant was born. And the name itself? It was a term of endearment their grandparents used for each other. Ed and Ben Robson could not have guessed that the secret to their destiny was lurking undetected in the attic.

At times, each of us has to recapture our destiny. As Jews, where do we turn to find our destiny, our purpose? Our very own Torah contains time-tested, relevant instructions for living. The Torah is our destiny and it is our "nature." Torah is not within the Jew: the Jew is within the Torah.

Parshas Chayei Sarah ~ Genesis 23:1 -- 25:18

Chayei Sarah begins with Sarah's death at the age of 127 and Abraham's search for a proper burial place which would be worthy of her greatness. Abraham is conned by Efron (a member of the Hittite nation who lived in the land of Israel) into paying an extremely large sum of money for her place of burial. Sarah is buried in M'arat HaMachpelah - the Tomb of the Patriarchs - in Hebron. Do you know who else is buried there? (answer: Adam & Eve, Isaac & Rebecca, Jacob & Leahin addition to Abraham and Sarah). Abraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer back to the old country (Aram Naharaim) to find a suitable wife for Isaac. Eliezer devises a plan by which he will find a modest, generous and kind girl fitting for his master's son. Eliezer decides to stand by the town's well, waiting for a girl to offer him, and his camels, water to drink. Suddenly Rebecca appears and exerts great effort to draw water for a stranger and his ten camels. She brings Eliezer to her father's house, whereupon Abraham's servant asks that Rebecca return with him to marry Isaac. She accepts, and they are married. The Torah states that "Isaac married Rebeccaand he loved her." This teaches us that true love comes after marriage, not before.

Rabbinic Ruminations

Henri Matisse was born in 1869, in northern France. Over a six-decade career he worked in all media, from painting to sculpture to printmaking. Although his subjects were traditional -- figures in landscapes, portraits, interior views -- his revolutionary use of brilliant color and exaggerated form to express emotion made him one of the most influential and successful artists of the 20th century.

However, the last ten years of Henri Matisse's life were far from what most of us would think of as joyful. His marriage was over, he was diagnosed with cancer and underwent a number of painful surgeries, and his beloved daughter was imprisoned and tortured by the Gestapo for aiding the French Resistance.

Who could have blamed him for calling it quits and sinking into deep despair? And yet, during this dark time he created the most joyful work of his career.

Confined to a wheelchair and crippled by pain, Matisse never stopped working. In fact, rather than a period of decline, it became what Matisse described as “*une seconde vie*” (a second life). He transformed the darkness into an intensely vibrant and productive period, creating “cut-outs”—the cut paper collages he described as “painting with scissors.” Unlike actual painting, painting with scissors could be done from his wheelchair or bed. Matisse once famously said, “Work cures everything,” and one cannot help but consider the therapeutic value of the cut-outs for Matisse. Studies show that meaningful work and a sense of purpose—a reason to get out of bed in the morning -- are linked with longevity and life satisfaction. Because of pain and physical limitations, Matisse often couldn’t get out of bed in the morning so he rose to the challenge and worked from his bedside instead.

Henri Matisse once said, “There are always flowers for those who want to see them.” The Chassidic master Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789–1866) distilled this as the Yiddish adage, *Tracht gut, vet zein gut*—“Think good, and it will be good.” What this means is that *bitachon*, the absolute assurance and conviction that G-d will make things good, actually becomes the conduit and vessel which draws down and enables us to receive G-d's blessings. Even in the autumn of his life, Henri Matisse chose to see the flowers -- a marvelous example of how positive thinking brings about positive results.

Quote of the Week

There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy. -- **Robert Louis Stevenson**

Joke of the Week

One day a man drove his secretary home after she fell quite ill at work. Although this was an innocent gesture, he decided not to mention it to his wife, who tended to get jealous easily.

Later that night the man and his wife were driving to a restaurant. Suddenly he looked down and spotted a high-heel shoe half hidden under the passenger seat. Not wanting to be conspicuous, he waited until his wife was looking out her window before he scooped up the shoe and tossed it out of the car. With a sigh of relief, he pulled into the restaurant parking lot.

That's when he noticed his wife squirming around in her seat.

"Honey," she asked, "have you seen my other shoe?"