

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason *Parshas Vayeira November 8, 2014*

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates ~

When Teagan Monfils looks back at her high school cross country running record, she will forever have a DQ, or disqualification, next to one important race. That DQ will likely be the greatest source of pride of her running career. Teagen, a junior at Shawano High School in Shawano, Wisconsin, was disqualified from a sectional cross country 5K race this past October for carrying a competitor across the finish line. Teagen, who was a state-qualifier her freshman year, stopped to pick up rival runner Jordan Ostrowski in the final stretch of the race. Jordan had fallen from exhaustion. Teagen struggled to get Jordan up and moving. When it became clear Jordan could barely stand, Teagen committed to getting the distressed runner the final 60 yards of the race, at times dragging Jordan forward. "She wasn't looking too stable on her feet," Teagen said. "I saw her fall ahead of me, and I know if it were me I'd want somebody to help me across. It's the last meet of our season; she just deserved to finish." The injured runner was taken by ambulance to a hospital but was not seriously injured.

Both runners were disqualified per official rules against assisting a runner during a race. Teagen's coach, though, could not have been more proud. "That's sportsmanship," Steve Stomberg said. "Yeah, you were disqualified, but that humanitarian part of you, that wonderful person that you are, came out. She wanted to help another person, and that's what I like. It's a credit to her."

Sports aren't just about games; they are about life. Good sportsmanship isn't just an extra frill; it is the essence of sports education. *Middot* -- good character traits -- aren't only to be learned in the classroom; they are to be learned in the gym, on the athletic field, and on the cross country course.

Parshas Vayeira Genesis 18:1 -- 21:24

The parsha begins with Abraham's incredible display of *chesed* (kindness) to three angels who appear as men. This, despite extreme discomfort from his recent *bris milah* (circumcision). The angels declare that Sarah will give birth to her first child at the age of 90 when Abraham would be 100. Later, Abraham pleads to G-d on behalf of the cities of Sodom and Gemorrah. However, the cities are soon destroyed, but not before the angels save Abraham's nephew Lot and his family from destruction.

Later the parsha describes how Sarah is abducted by Avimelech, the king of Gerar, who did not realize she was married. G-d responds by striking him with a plague which prevents him from touching her. Sarah conceives and gives birth to Isaac, and Abraham makes a huge celebration. Sarah sees Ishmael (Abraham's son from Hagar) as a menace to her own son's spiritual well-being, and asks Abraham to expel Ishmael and Hagar. The Torah portion concludes with the *akeidah*, Abraham's tenth and final test, in which he shows his willingness to comply with G-d's command to bring his beloved son Isaac as an offering.

Rabbinic Ruminations

It's easy to recognize that our mood affects how we walk, but does our walking style affect our mood? When we're in a good mood, it's clear that our style of walking tends to reflect how we feel: We bounce along, shoulders back, swinging our arms in style. Now, a new study ([Michalak et al., 2015](#)) finds that it also works the other way around: People who imitate a happy style of walking, even without realizing it, find themselves feeling happier.

The study had participants (39 undergraduates) walking on a treadmill after looking at a list of positive and negative words. While on the treadmill each person's gait and posture were continuously measured and fed back to them visually. On the screen they had to try and move a bar either one way or the other by changing their walking style. Although they didn't realize it, walking in a happy way made the bar move in one direction and walking in a depressed way moved it the other. Afterwards, they were asked to write down as many of the positive and negative words that they'd been shown earlier. Those who'd been walking in a happy, upbeat way remembered more of the positive words, suggesting they were

happier. The study also found that those who walked in a slumped, round-shouldered, depressed way, remembered more of the negative words. One conclusion of the study: The style of walking has effects on the vulnerability to depression.

Just as our actions influence our emotions, our actions influence our character. The *Sefer HaChinuch* ("The Book of Instruction"), a 13th-century work on the 613 Commandments, states: "A person is changed by his actions." (Mitzvah 16). We become the way we behave -- not immediately, but slowly, as the years progress and as our behavior becomes ingrained. Act the way you want to feel. Walk the way you want to become. And in which way should we desire to walk? "*Hashem will establish you as his holy people -- as He swore to you -- if you observe the commands of Hashem your G-d and walk in His ways (Deuteronomy 28:9)*

Quote of the Week

Never worry when people say you are being too idealistic. It is only idealistic people who change the world, and do you really want, in the course of your life, to leave the world unchanged? ~ **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

Joke of the Week

An old man sold pretzels on a street corner for 25 cents each. Every day a young well-dressed man would leave his office building at lunch time, and as he passed the pretzel stand, he would leave the man a quarter, but he never took a pretzel.

This went on for more than seven years. The two of them never spoke. One day, as the young man passed the old man's stand and left his quarter as usual, the pretzel man spoke to him.

"Sir, I appreciate your business. You are a very good customer, but I have to tell you that the pretzel price has gone up to 50 cents."