

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason

Parshas Lech Lecha October 11, 2013

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

We all enjoy music. But does listening to music have a beneficial carry-over effect once the music stops? A team of German researchers set out to identify the effects of significant musical experiences and show that these moments can have positive, lasting effects. By coding the exact words used by participants asked to recall intense musical experiences (they call them IMEs), the scientists were able to create a model of how these experiences are perceived both in the moment and afterwards.

Listeners reported a sense of transcendence during IMEs, having experienced harmony and self-realization. IMEs, it was suggested, leave people with a strong motivation to attain the same harmony in their daily lives. Many of the test subjects even claimed that intense musical experiences gave them greater insight into their spirituality. And based on their observations, researchers believe that IMEs cause long-term changes to occur in people's personal values, their perception of the meaning of life, social relationships, engagement, activities and personal development.

King David said, "The Torah of G-d is perfect, it restores the soul" (Psalm 19:8), meaning that through Torah study and fulfillment of the *mitzvos* (commandments), we can reach our spiritual potential. **The Midrash states that G-d looked in the Torah and created the world, and that He used the Torah as a blueprint of reality. Since all reality is based upon the Torah,** our lives can become more fulfilling, spiritual, and harmonious through living a Jewishly-committed life. Let your soul sing; like music, Torah nourishes your soul.

Parshas Lech Lecha Genesis 12:1 -- 17:27

Abraham was called by G-d to leave his homeland, his father's house, and his position of status and prosperity to travel to the land that G-d would show him. Upon arrival with his wife Sarah and nephew Lot in the land of Israel, they discover it to be ravaged by a horrible famine. Traveling to descend to Egypt for a temporary stay, the immoral Egyptians immediately capture Sarah and take her to the Egyptian king. G-d responds by afflicting the king and his household with a debilitating plague until he releases her. Guess what the plague was?

Back in the land of Israel, Lot parts ways with Abraham, with Lot relocating to the fertile plains of Sodom. Abraham subsequently rescues the kidnapped Lot by miraculously defeating four kings and their armies. Through a Covenant, G-d promises Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Because she had no children, Sarah gives her maidservant Hagar to Abraham as a wife, and their son Yishmael is born. At the age of 99 Abraham circumcises himself, his son Yishmael and the other male members of his household.

Rabbinic Ruminations

In 1948, psychologist Bertram Forer gave a personality test to his students. He told his students they were each receiving a unique personality analysis that was based on the test's results and to rate their analysis on a scale of 0 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) on how well it applied to themselves. In reality, each received the same analysis, some of which said:

You have a great need for other people to like and admire you. You have a tendency to be critical of yourself. You have a great deal of unused capacity which you have not turned to your advantage. While you have some personality weaknesses, you are generally able to compensate for them. At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing.

On average, the rating was 4.26, but only after the ratings were turned in it was revealed that each student had received identical copies assembled by Forer from various horoscopes! As can be seen from the profile, there are a number of statements that could apply equally to anyone. The *Forer effect* is also known as the "Barnum effect." This term was coined because of a similarity to certain "pseudo-successful" psychological tests to those given by American showman, businessman and scam artist,

P.T. Barnum. Barnum is widely but erroneously credited with coining the phrase, "There's a sucker born every minute." However, Barnum often did use the promotional line of, "We've got something for everyone."

The *Forer effect* -- the tendency of people to interpret general statements as being accurate for them personally, even when they are not -- can provide a partial explanation for the widespread acceptance of some beliefs and practices, such as astrology, fortune telling, graphology, and some types of personality tests. The Torah tells us "You should go with innocence before Hashem, your G-d ." Our rabbis derive an important inference from this verse; one should act with innocence with G-d, but not always with other people. Seek to strike a balance of judging people favorably and giving others the benefit of the doubt, while simultaneously taking practical precautions to avoid being harmed.

Quote of the Week

It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him. -- **J.R.R. Tolkien**

Joke of the Week

In 2007 and 2008, the annual Chabad telethon ran a contest called *My Zaide Was So Religious*, pitting comedian/host Elon Gold against writer Erik Shapiro to see who could *out-frum* the other.

The level of stringencies increased with each round, until one of the contestants was declared the winner.

Some of the funniest ones:

My Zaide was so religious that he had two toothbrushes -- one for milk and one for meat.

My Zaide was so religious that on Shabbos he wouldn't even let his voice carry.

My Zaide was so religious that he wouldn't eat meat from a cow because it once had milk in it.

My Zaide was so religious that on Shabbos he wouldn't carry a grudge.

My Zaide was so religious that he would make a *brocha* (blessing) before he swallowed his pride.

My Zaide was so religious that he stood shiva.