

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Chayei Sarah October 25, 2013

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

78-year-old Tona Herndon was laying flowers at the grave of her recently buried husband of 60 years, when the unspeakable happened -- Mrs. Herndon was mugged by a male attacker and robbed of \$700. When 15-year-old Christian Lunsford saw the mug shot on TV of the mugger, he immediately recognized the man; it was his estranged father. The Oklahoma teen, who said he barely speaks to his father who is in-and-out of jail, phoned Mrs. Herndon and asked to meet in a church parking lot so he could apologize on behalf of his father. "It needed to be done," Christian Lunsford said. "She needed an apology from somebody. If I didn't apologize, who would?"

Upon meeting the 78-year-old-widow, Christian Lunsford offered an apology -- and noted that he had also just received \$250 from his father to attend a band camp. He then surprised Mrs. Herndon by giving her the money, saying that he wasn't sure if the money was hers but that he couldn't keep it, and felt obligated to do what he could to make things right. Mrs. Herndon accepted the money from the teen. Then, she gave it back. "I want you to take your band trip," Mrs. Herndon told Christian, noting it "was a joy" to help the teen. Afterwards, Mrs. Herndon reflected on the teen's actions, saying, "I thought that was so, so precious. Any 15-year-old boy who has that much conscience is extraordinary." Mrs. Herndon said to Christian Lunsford, "You are not who your parents are. Even if they do raise you, you can become whatever you want to be."

Good Jews aspire to be better than they are. A Jew should always be 'on the way', always on the journey. Which way? "For I command you today to love Hashem your G-d, to walk in His ways, and to observe His commandments..." (Deuteronomy 30:16) Regardless of our Jewish background and education, we can become whatever type of Jew we want to be.

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 which 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

Researchers at the University of Kansas found that character assessments based on shoes were surprisingly accurate. 63 students looked at images of 208 peoples' shoes and easily guessed psychological profiles. The study also showed that the pair of shoes the owner wears most often also reveals political ideology and demographic details such as annual income, gender and age. How can such a minimal appearance cue -- a pair of shoes -- reveal such extensive, accurate information? Shoes have great variety of styles, brands, looks, and functions. Because of this variety, shoes can carry individual difference information. For example, people who are extroverted may think black-and-white is dull, and tend to wear more colorful shoes as an expression of their personality. People with higher income may be more likely to wear shoes with high-end brands as a mean to exhibit their social status. Conscientious people might clean and organize their shoes more regularly; their shoes may

possess a newer or tidier look than shoes of others. A more relaxed and laid back person may wear worn-in shoes, while pristine shoes may indicate someone more likely concerned with appearance. People need very little information – a mere *thin slice* – to form a judgment. Nevertheless, the consensus and accuracy in people's judgments of first impressions are quite remarkable. Researchers focusing on first impressions made while on a date found that even after a relatively short period of conversation (e.g., 3–8 min), people form a quick first impression and use it to decide if they would like to date a person or not.

Comedienne Phyllis Diller said, "A smile is a curve that sets everything straight." A real smile has multiple benefits. When you smile, the muscles of your face allow more oxygen-carrying blood to flow to your brain and physiologically you enter a better state. In Pirkei Avos (1:15) we learn, "Shamai taught, 'Greet every person with a smiling and warm face!' " One's positive demeanor can be contagious, causing others to be affected with a glimmer of optimism and hope. A smile is a sign that you care about someone. And -- more than a good pair of shoes -- a broad, warm smile makes a great first impression.

Quote of the Week

The real voyage of discovery consists of not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

-- *Marcel Proust*

Joke of the Week

Two construction workers were sitting on a building site during lunch time. As they opened their lunch boxes, Joe said to Bill, "Yuk, peanut butter sandwiches again! I swear if I have the same sandwich for lunch tomorrow I'll go crazy!" This same scenario repeated itself each day; Joe would open his lunch pail, and complain to Bill about the peanut butter sandwich.

Several weeks of Joe's complaints had reached a breaking point: Finally one day at the lunch break, Bill said, "Joe -- every day for the past two weeks you've been complaining about your lunch. If you so dislike peanut butter sandwiches, why does your wife keep making them?"

Joe said, "Bill, leave my wife out of this -- I make my own sandwiches!"