

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Nitzavim-Vayelech September 20, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates ~

When someone says something outrageous and unbelievable, one may say "Are you out of your tree?"; meaning, that the person is out of their mind about such an idea. But to Tim Kovar, being out of his tree is an occupational hazard. Tim, a Professional Tree Climber who runs an international tree-climbing school, teaches people how to access, connect, and experience the top of trees in a safe manner. Some of Tim's students include adventure seekers, nature lovers, poets, birders, arborists, canopy researchers and eco-tourism guides.

Tim says he is fortunate to have climbed trees in 49 states (missing Alaska) and in over 15 countries. When asked if people sleep in trees, Tim said, "Yes. Sleeping in trees is magical. We use a specially-designed hammock called a Treeboat. It's a totally different experience when you sleep in a tree. The nocturnal sounds are enchanting and the way the moonlight filters through the leaves and branches can almost be mesmerizingit's quite peaceful except when you're six inches away from a robin chirping -- that can be DEAFENING!" What does Tim think about his job? "I love introducing folks into this unique realm where time seems to stand still and nature comes back alive."

Choosing the ideal occupation is not a trivial decision. The profession one chooses can affect whether an individual remains honest, one's enjoyment and pleasure in life, and one's connection to the Almighty. The Talmud says, "A person should love work and not hate it; for just as the Torah was given with a covenant, so too was work given with a covenant." A boring job can drive youout of your tree! Love your work, and love working hard.

Parshas Nitzavim - Vayelech Deuteronomy 29:9 - 31:30

Nitzavim begins with Moses gathering every member of the Jewish people for the final time. He initiates them into a Covenant with G-d as the Almighty's 'Chosen People'. This Covenant applied not only to those present on that day, but to all future Jewish generations. A question for your consideration; how could someone not present be bound to a commitment made by their ancestors? What is the binding force today that obligates all Jews to keep a Torah accepted over 3,000 years ago?

Moses tells the people that although eventually they will sin, in time they will repent and return to the Torah, and G-d will usher in the messianic era when we all return to the land of Israel. Furthermore, he assures them that the commandments are neither distant nor inaccessible ('it is not in heaven'). This means that a committed Jewish life is well within everyone's reach.

Vayelech opens with Moses walking through the Jewish camp on the final day of his life to say goodbye to his beloved people. He teaches them the mitzvah of *Hakel*, the once-in-seven-years gathering of the entire nation to hear the king read certain passages from the Torah. G-d commands that a special Torah, written by Moses, be placed by the Levites at the side of the Holy Ark to bear witness against Israel if they were to ever deviate from its teachings.

Rabbinic Ruminations

"Take the stairs instead of the escalator or elevator and feel better" is something we often hear or read. But would more people take the stairs over the escalator if it was fun to do? *Piano Stairs* were set up next to an escalator in an attempt to entice people to climb stairs to the tune of their steps. *Piano Stairs* have proven to be a hit in cities worldwide, from Milan, Italy to Santiago, Chile and more. When faced with the choice between climbing stairs, or riding the escalator, subway commuters choose to take the stairs 66 percent more often if they're piano stairs.

Fun design has been shown to influence behavior in positive ways. In fact, Volkswagen sponsored a 'Fun Theory' campaign in which "...an open invitation was extended to submit ideas that made seemingly baleful social challenges — environmental protection, speed-limit adherence, boosting public

transportation ridership — enjoyable." Other examples of fun design: The Bottle Bank Arcade which made recycling fun; and The Playbelt which prohibited drivers from accessing in-car entertainment systems until every passenger was safely buckled in.

Fun design influences behavior, and fun products sell better. Participants in a research study ate more ice cream when they served themselves with a whimsical ice cream scoop than a plain one, an alligator-shaped stapler inspired more creativity than a normal one, a playfully colored gift certificate encouraged more frivolous purchases than an ordinary one, and test participants ate more cutely decorated cookies than plain ones. Products and design influence behavior. Your challenge? Make choices that bring out the best in you. The Torah tells us, '*u'bacharta b'chaim*' – choose life [Deut. 30:19]. May the coming year be one where we make the best choices.

Quote of the Week

"The full use of your powers along lines of excellence." - *definition of "happiness" by John F. Kennedy (1917-1963)*

Joke of the Week

Mr. Gross and his 17-year-old son Yanky were walking down the street in a fervently religious Jewish section of New York City. Every few seconds someone would stop Mr. Gross and wish him a hearty Mazel Tov. After a few blocks like this, Yanky said to his father,

"*Tatty* (father), why is everyone wishing you Mazel Tov?"

Mr. Gross: "Oy, Vey!! I forgot to tell you! Last night you became a '*chassan*' (engaged)!"

Yanky protested, "*Tatty*, I told you a hundred times that I didn't want to get engaged this way, without my consent. This whole arranged marriage business is just ridiculous!! How could you do this to me? I am so upset!!"

Mr. Gross answered his son, "Yanky, I am warning you! If you don't behave, I am not going to let you come to the wedding!"