

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Aaron removed his jacket and unpacked his worn siddur (prayer book). Then, he carefully placed his tefillin on his left arm and forehead, binding them with black leather straps. Now, it was time to pray. This scenario takes place thousands of times daily in synagogues and Jewish schools throughout the world. However, what happened next during the service was anything but typical. A man walked over, politely interrupting Aaron's meditation, asked how he was, and then, rather proudly, said: "We're going to get tickets for one of your games. My kids, they are very excited."

Aaron Liberman, 6 feet 10 inches, is believed to be the third Orthodox Jew to play Division I basketball. Aaron, a freshman center at Northwestern University who is already being referred to as the "Jewish Dwight Howard" on basketball sites, spent one year studying in Israel and led the United States to a gold medal at the Maccabi Pan American Games in Brazil. Northwestern has made arrangements so that Aaron never has to fly on the Sabbath. He takes separate flights if necessary. The university is also designing special 'game' yarmulkes for him, being made by a company called Klipped Kippahs. Aaron said, "There's been a lot of luck every step of the way in my life. I definitely take pride in people in the Jewish community seeing me as a role model, but I try not to make too big of a scene."

One need not be a basketball star to follow the Torah and serve as a role model. When our children and others observe that we humbly pursue a committed Jewish lifestyle, acting with honesty and integrity, there's no doubt we will make a positive impression. Such role models are especially needed today. If you 'walk the walk' in being a good Jew, being a good role model like Aaron Liberman will be a slam dunk.

Parshas Yisro Exodus 18:1 -- 20:23

The weekly portion begins with Moses' father-in-law, Yisro, arriving at the Jewish people's camp in the desert, where he is greeted warmly by a large entourage. Yisro was inspired to join them when he heard about all of the wonders and miracles which G-d performed for the Jewish people during the exodus from Egypt. Upon witnessing Moses serving as the people's sole judge from dawn until dusk, Yisro declares that this system will never work. He therefore suggests that subordinate judges be appointed to adjudicate the smaller cases. Moses agrees to this plan.

The Jewish people arrive at Mt. Sinai (the mountain, not the hospital) and prepare to receive the Torah. Moses ascends the mountain and G-d tells him to convey to the people that they will be to Him a treasure from among the nations. After three days of preparation, the appointed moment of revelation finally arrives. Amid thunder, lightning and the sound of the shofar, G-d descends upon the mountain and proclaims -- with the entire Jewish people listening -- the Ten Commandments. Referred to in Hebrew as the Aseres HaDibros, a more accurate translation would be the Ten Sayings or the Ten Statements. One noteworthy feature of the revelation is that both before and since Sinai, no nation has ever made the claim that G-d spoke to an entire nation of millions of individuals. Moses then ascends the mountain to receive the remainder of the Torah from G-d, both the written and oral segments. The portion concludes with several mitzvos concerning the construction of the altar in the Temple.

Rabbinical Ruminations

"No pain, no gain" is a well-known exercise motto that promises benefits for the price of hard and even painful work. A recent study at the University of Turin claims that verbally suggesting the benefits of painful exercise will cause the body to release more pain-killing substances than would otherwise occur, and in turn, increase pain tolerance.

Researchers induced pain in a group of volunteers by reducing blood flow to the subjects' arms. The subjects were asked to tolerate the subsequent pain for as long as possible. Some of the subjects were told, honestly, that inducing pain to one's arm isn't a good thing. The rest were told, deceitfully, that the pain would lead to beneficial muscular changes. The researchers found that the second group, who thought the pain was good for them, endured the pain significantly longer than the first group. Why? Since the subjects believed that the pain was for a good purpose, their bodies released more of the chemicals that help with tolerating pain. This finding goes beyond "mind over matter"; it shows the body can produce documentable physiological changes based on what one believes about a given potentially painful task.

"No pain, no gain" is also a spiritual concept. It is written in Ethics of the Fathers (5:27): "According to the pain is the gain." If there is no pain and effort in doing what G-d commands, there is no spiritual gain. The harder life seems to be and the more difficult the challenges, the greater the ultimate reward. A source of strength to carry us through the difficult days and years of our lives is knowing that the harder and more difficult our challenges appear,

the more reward G-d has in store for us if we persevere. The number of stairs in life we have climbed determines the true worth of our individual efforts and accomplishments.

Quote of the Week

One man cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied in doing wrong in any other department. Life is one indivisible whole. -- ***Gandhi***

Joke of the Week

The rabbi was enthused about a favorite Torah topic, and began his weekly Shabbat sermon with gusto. He engaged the congregation and they seemed to love his talk. However, he continued to expound at length upon deep insights and practical tips. Suddenly, the rabbi realized he had been talking for two hours! He paused to apologize to the weary and restless congregation, and explained that he had left his watch at home. A voice came from the audience, "Rabbi, don't worry. On the wall next to you is a calendar!"