

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*  
*Parshas Shemini April 18, 2015*

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Russell Westbrook of the NBA Oklahoma City Thunder has had many outstanding highlights during the current season. But Russell's best moment of the year followed his having been named the MVP of the All-Star Game back in February. His prize was a \$25,000 new car, courtesy of Kia. Once the point guard got back to Oklahoma City, he realized he could put the car to better use. So, Russell got in touch with Oklahoma City's Sunbeam Family Services and surprised Kerstin Gonzales, a 19-year-old single mother of two, by giving her his new car. Kerstin's current car was not in great driving shape; she had been borrowing cars from family and friends to be able to get to work, to get to school and to pick up her sons.

On the morning of a meeting at Sunbeam Family Services, Kerstin was waiting with her two young boys for a few minutes when she suddenly sensed a figure stroll behind her chair. As two large hands tapped her on the shoulder, Kerstin turned around to see Russell Westbrook's signature wide grin. The initial shock of seeing a Thunder player didn't last long, because as the Thunder point guard introduced himself, he told Kerstin that he had a surprise for her – a brand new car. At first, Kerstin was skeptical, but as soon as Russell pulled the keys out of his pocket (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIBCWuzDUjo>), she broke into tears. “Are they playing a prank on me or something?” Kerstin said of her initial reaction. “When he showed me the keys, I was like ‘this is real’. That’s when I started to cry because it’s been such a hard time.” For his part, Russell, “There were definitely tears of joy and I could tell some tears of hard work and all the different things she’s been through in her life. Today was a stepping stone in showing her that everything is going to be alright.” In Proverbs (22:9) King Solomon said, *“A person with generosity of spirit will be blessed.”* A person who is concerned about others focuses his attention upon those around him and is sensitive to their needs and wishes. His mind is occupied thinking what can be done to help them. His generosity of spirit leads him to take action to bring about positive change for other people and society. Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for kindness. Kindness, like a boomerang, always returns a blessing -- particularly in the form of the pleasure we receive when we give to others.

*Parshas Shemini Leviticus 9:1 - 11:47*

This week's Torah portion begins by discussing the events which occurred on the eighth and final day of the inauguration service of the Mishkan. After months of preparation, Aaron and his sons are finally installed as Kohanim in an elaborate service. Aaron blesses the people, and the entire nation rejoices as G-d's presence rests upon them. However, the excitement comes to an abrupt halt as Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, are consumed by a heavenly fire in the Mishkan while innovating an offering of incense on the altar. This incident stresses the need to perform the commandments only as G-d directed. Later, Moses consoles Aaron, who grieves in silence.

Have you ever wondered where the laws of kosher food come from? Parshas Shemini concludes with a listing of the kosher and non-kosher animals. The identifying signs of a kosher animal are that it has split hooves and chews, regurgitates and re-chews its food. A kosher fish is one that has both fins and scales. All birds not included in the list of forbidden fowl are permitted. However, today the identity of these non-kosher birds is doubtful. Therefore, we're forbidden to eat any species of bird unless there is a well-established tradition that it is kosher. The Torah forbids all types of insects except for four species of locusts. Chocolate-covered grasshoppers, anyone? The laws of kashrut help us to be distinct and holy -- like G-d, Himself.

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

A small number of nursing professionals believe in a "lunar effect" -- a purported correlation between the phases of the Earth's moon and human affairs, such as busier hospital emergency rooms or more births. A new study finds that the full moon is NOT linked to a 'lunar-lunacy' connection. Jean-Luc Margot, a UCLA professor of planetary astronomy, who carried out the study (<http://journals.lww.com/nursingresearchonline/pages/articleviewer.aspx?year=9000&issue=00000&articl>

[e=99876&type=abstract](#)), said: "Some nurses ascribe the apparent chaos to the moon, but dozens of studies show that the belief is unfounded." Similarly, there is no evidence that the moon has any influence on such things as automobile accidents, violent behavior, or even criminal activity. The belief that there might be a link is likely due to a bias in the way even intelligent people think called the *confirmation bias*. It arises because people search for information that confirms their view of the world and ignore what doesn't fit.

Another study of the *confirmation bias* occurred during the 2004 US presidential election. Participants who reported having strong feelings about the candidates were shown apparently contradictory pairs of statements, either from Republican candidate George W. Bush, Democratic candidate John Kerry or a politically neutral public figure. They were also given further statements that made the apparent contradiction seem reasonable. From these three pieces of information, they had to decide whether or not each person's individual statements were inconsistent. There were strong differences in these evaluations, with participants much more likely to interpret statements from the candidate they opposed as contradictory.

American astrophysicist Saul Perlmutter said, "*Your job as a scientist is to figure out how you're fooling yourself.*" And it's not only scientists who often automatically confirm preconceived biases. Every person is subject to cognitive biases, those annoying glitches in our thinking that cause us to make questionable decisions and reach erroneous conclusions. Where can we find objectivity? "*The Torah of G-d is perfect,*" says King David in Psalm 19:8, "*restoring the soul; the testimony of G-d is trustworthy, making the simple one wise.*" Let your compass for truth be the Torah.

### *Quote of the Week*

The only thing new in this world is the history you don't know -- **Harry S Truman**, 33<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States (1884-1972)

### **Joke of the Week**

A five year old boy went for a weekend trip with his grandparents. On the way home, they stopped at a country restaurant for lunch.

The little boy left the table to use the restroom by himself. A moment later he returned with a confused look on his face. He said, "Grandpa, am I a rooster or a hen?"