

*Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*  
*Parshas Shoftim August 30, 2014*

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates ~*

Tanishq Abraham graduated from high school in June with a 4.0 GPA and a Mensa membership — he's also 10 years old. The pint size prodigy, who lives in Sacramento, Calif., also received a congratulatory letter from President Barack Obama just in time for his big day. "I sensed there was something different about Tanishq when he was 6 months old because he became very interested in clocks and numbers — he started counting and could point out numbers when he saw them in books," Tanishq's mother, veterinarian Taji Abraham, said. "He would also stare very intently at photos and ask so many questions. I always wondered, 'Why is he so curious?'"

By the time Tanishq was 2, he was adding and subtracting numbers. "I told my husband that Tanishq was very smart, but he said I was just a proud mom," she says. By the time Tanishq turned 6, he was "pestering" his mother to take paleontology college classes. After he skipped first grade, Taji began homeschooling her son and allowed him to enroll in college courses while he studied for his high school degree. In September, Tanishq will be a full-time student at American River College in Sacramento where he'll take on a five-class course load. Tanishq hopes to transfer as a junior to another university. "He would like to attend either Harvard, MIT, or Cornell," says Taji. After that, he wants to enroll in medical school and then research a cure for cancer — a goal he's had since he was 4.

Ethics of the Fathers (4:1) teaches, "*Who is wise? He who learns from all people.*" Your curiosity and thirst will take you to every person and every place; it will not be quenched until you have drunk your fill. Questions are powerful -- and very human -- tools for learning. Look how far questioning and curiosity has taken 10-year-old Tanishq Abraham.

*Parshas Shoftim -- Deuteronomy 16:18 - 21:9*

Moses proceeds to review the regulations necessary for a civilized society. Local judges and officers were to be appointed in every city, and justice was to be administered righteously and impartially. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden. The Sanhedrin -- the Jewish High Court of seventy one judges -- is to make Torah-based binding decisions on new situations to prevent the fragmentation of the Jewish people.

When the Jewish people request a king, the king was not to misuse his power to amass many horses, maintain a harem nor accumulate great wealth. To order his priorities and not become haughty he should write a copy of the Torah and carry it with him. When the Jewish people had righteous kings such as David and Solomon, it was a blessing. When we had wicked kings such as Jereboam and Ahav, it was a curse.

The nation's conduct in war is mentioned. The Jewish people are told not to be afraid of the enemy, not to destroy any fruit trees in battle, and that they should first give the enemy a chance to make peace. The portion also forbids all forms of superstition and 'magic' practiced by the soothsayer. We have no need for such tricks because of our true prophets and faith in G-d. The Jewish people are promised by G-d that He will send prophets to guide them, and Moses explains how a genuine prophet may be distinguished from a false one.

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

You're schmoozing with friends, when someone brings up *The Brothers Karamazov*. Finding yourself caught in the middle of a conversation about a book you haven't read -- or perhaps, never heard of -- do you: (A) listen quietly, (B) excuse yourself, saying you forgot to *daven*, or (C) say something about the book anyway, in an effort to seem smart? When 2,000 Britons were polled last year about tactics they'd used to try to appear more intelligent, 62 percent of them confessed to having chosen option C. Indeed, according to the survey, lying about having read classic books was the most popular strategy for appearing smarter. Another strategy identified by the survey, wearing glasses, appears to be

surprisingly effective. Figures released in 2011 by the College of Optometrists, in the U.K., show that 43 percent of the people it surveyed believe glasses make a person look more intelligent.

But you may not need glasses. A Czech study found that certain facial features—narrow faces, long noses, and thin chins—correlated with both perceived intelligence and attractiveness. Other ways to signal intelligence without opening your mouth include walking at the same pace as those around you. How you write matters, too—particularly how you write your name. Middle initials apparently lend a person a certain cachet. Participants in a study published this year rated writing samples more favorably when the author's name included a middle initial; they also presumed people with middle initials to be of higher social status than their uninitialed peers.

Ethics of the Fathers teaches, "*Who is wise? He who learns from all people.*" The message is that one who seeks wisdom wherever it may be found is the one most likely to acquire it. He is willing to ask anyone and everyone. Such a person may be considered wise even before he has studied, since his desire will soon lead him on the direct path towards scholarship. A focus on becoming wise, rather than appearing smart, is a wise approach.

### *Quote of the Week*

What is strength without a double share of wisdom? -- *John Milton, Seventeenth-Century Poet*

### **Joke of the Week**

An atheist was spending a quiet day fishing when suddenly his boat was attacked by the Loch Ness monster. In one easy flip, the beast tossed him and his boat high into the air. Then it opened its mouth to swallow both.

As the man sailed head over heels, he cried out, "Oh, my G-d! Help me!"

At once, the ferocious attack scene froze in place, and as the atheist hung in mid-air, a booming voice came down from the clouds, "I thought you didn't believe in Me!"

"Come on G-d, give me a break!!" the man pleaded. "Two minutes ago I didn't believe in the Loch Ness monster either!"