

## *Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*

### *Parshas Ki Savo August 23, 2013*

#### *Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates*

A northern Arizona family decided to leave the U.S. over what they considered government interference in religion. So, Sean and Hannah Gastonguay "decided to take a leap of faith and see where G-d led us", and took their two small children and set sail for the tiny island nation of Kiribati in May. The family moved in November from Arizona to San Diego, where they lived on their boat as they prepared to set sail. Hannah, 26, gave birth to the couple's 8-month-old girl on the boat, which was docked in a slip at the time. In May, Hannah, her 30-year-old husband Sean, his father Mike, and the couple's daughters, 3-year-old Ardith and baby Rahab set off. They wouldn't touch land again for 91 days.

Just weeks into their journey, the Gastonguays hit a series of storms that damaged their small boat, leaving them adrift for weeks, unable to make progress. Hannah said, "(at first) we were cruising." But within a couple of weeks "when we came out there, storm, storm, storm." They had been on the ocean for about two months, out of food and down to "some juice and some honey." She said they were able to catch fish, but they didn't see any boats. Eventually, their boat was spotted by a helicopter that had taken off from a nearby Venezuelan fishing vessel, which ended up saving them. "The captain said, 'Do you know where you're at? You're in the middle of nowhere.'" The family was eventually picked up by a Venezuelan fishing vessel, transferred to a Japanese cargo ship and taken to Chile, and then returned to the U.S. Hannah Gastonguay said the family will now "go back to Arizona" and "come up with a new plan."

Meaningful change requires a well-conceived plan. Common detours on the road to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are grandiose, poorly thought-out resolutions and commitments. Leaps of faith rarely have happy landings. Changes involving small, measurable steps have great success potential. Come up with a new plan this year -- but look before you leap.

#### *Parshas Ki Savo Deuteronomy 26:1 -- 29:8*

The parsha begins by describing the annual mitzvah for farmers in Israel to bring their *bikurim*, or first fruits, to the Kohen in the Temple. The donor was then to recite a prayer of thanksgiving, recalling how G-d had delivered his ancestors from Egypt and brought the new generation into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Moses then teaches two special mitzvos, which the Jewish people are to perform upon entering the land of Israel. First, they are to inscribe the entire Torah on twelve large stones. Second, the twelve tribes are to ratify their acceptance of the Torah in the following manner; six tribes were to stand on Mt. Gerizim, representing the blessings, while the remaining six tribes were to stand on Mt. Eival, signifying the curses. The Levites were to stand in the valley between, reciting blessings and curses which will apply respectively to those who observe and defy the Torah.

The parsha concludes with a recounting of the wonderful blessings G-d will bestow upon the Jewish people for remaining faithful, and a chilling prophecy of what might happen if the Jewish people do not follow the Torah.

#### *Rabbinical Ruminations*

Ask Kanzi a question -- and you just might get an answer. Kanzi is a male bonobo (similar to a chimpanzee) who has been featured in several studies on great ape language and has exhibited advanced linguistic aptitude. As an infant Kanzi accompanied his mother Matata to sessions where Matata was taught language through keyboard lexigrams (figures or symbols representing words). It was a great surprise to researchers when one day while Matata was away, Kanzi began competently using the lexigrams, becoming not only the first observed ape to have learned aspects of language naturalistically rather than through direct training, but also the first observed bonobo to appear to use some elements of language at all. Kanzi has since learned more than two hundred words, and when he

hears a spoken word (through headphones, to filter out nonverbal clues), he points to the correct lexigram.

Other enculturated apes have undergone extensive language training programs (with the use of gestures and other visual forms of communications) and successfully learned to answer quite complex questions and requests (including question words "who" what", "where"). However, thus far no ape has successfully learned how to *ask questions themselves*. Researchers David and Anne Premack (authors of the 1983 book *The Mind of the Ape*) wrote: "Though (the ape) understood the question, she did not herself ask any questions — unlike the child who asks interminable questions, such as What that? Who making noise? When Daddy come home? Me go Granny's house? Where puppy? (She) never delayed the departure of her trainer after her lessons by asking where the trainer was going, when she was returning, or anything else." It is suggested that the ability to ask questions is the central cognitive element that distinguishes human and animal cognitive abilities.

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. His thirst will take him to every person and every place; it will not be quenched until he has drunk his fill. 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. Questions are powerful -- and very human -- tools for learning.

### *Quote of the Week*

Most of the luxuries and many of the so-called comforts of life are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind -- *Henry David Thoreau*

### **Joke of the Week**

"Two Jews, each with a parrot on his shoulder, are in front of a synagogue," Yankel Ginsburg begins to tell his friend Irv Schwartz, when the latter interrupts.

"Yankel, old pal, all your jokes are always about Jews. Don't you have any other jokes?" Ginsburg replies that of course he does, and begins again: "Two samurai meet on a dark night on the outskirts of Tokyo. The next day is Yom Kippur . . ."