

*Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*  
*Parshas Ki Sisa February 14, 2014*

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates*

In the 1970s, airlines used to carry extra flight attendants and management representatives like Devi Bellows to serve as onboard fixers. At a recent flight attendant reunion, Devi told of the time a full 747 flying from Los Angeles to New York was loaded with 125 kosher meals, but only 50 people said they had ordered the special meal.

Flight attendants got hysterical, she said, when they realized they would get to the back of the plane and have only kosher meals to serve. So Devi decided to create a contest. She announced a "special promotion" for that flight. The first 50 people who raised their hands would receive a special meal the airline was testing. Hands shot up quickly. Flight attendants stripped the kosher label off and "there was not one letter of complaint," she said.

How can we learn to be quick thinkers? 1) Relax. Otherwise, your brain will be cluttered and not think straight. 2) Analyze. Examine the situation, and assess possible solutions. 3) Eat healthy food. Good food makes your brain work better. 4) Exercise. Exercising helps your body function better. 5) Sleep. Sufficient sleep is important. 6) Learn Torah. "The Torah of G-d is perfect, restoring the soul: the testimony of G-d is sure, making wise the foolish" (Psalm 19:8)

*Parshas Ki Sisa Exodus 30:11 -- 34:35*

The portion begins with G-d's command to Moses to take a census by collecting an equal contribution of a half-shekel coin from every adult male between the ages of 20 and 60, with the profits going to the Mishkan (Tabernacle). G-d designates Betzalel, of the tribe of Judah, and Oholiav, of the tribe of Dan, to supervise the upcoming construction of the Mishkan. The mitzvah of Shabbat is then repeated to caution the nation that even the construction of the Mishkan does not supersede the observance of the weekly day of rest.

The Torah returns to the narrative of the Revelation at Mt. Sinai and describes the horrible sin of the golden calf. G-d relents to Moses' prayer that the Children of Israel should be spared from annihilation for this great transgression, and Moses descends from the mountain with the two tablets of the Ten Commandments in hand. Upon witnessing a small segment of the population dancing around the golden calf, Moses smashes the tablets and burns the idol, initiating the process of repentance. Moses again ascends the mountain to pray to G-d that the Jewish people should be forgiven and regain their status as the chosen people. Moses eventually returns with the second set of tablets and a renewed covenant with G-d, his face radiant as a result of the Divine experience.

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

Do you know what influences your feelings and decision making? There are dozens of factors that influence our thoughts and beliefs.

-- It's well known that many police departments and detention centers use a certain shade of pink in their cells because the color is believed to have a calming effect.

-- We know that the earth's surface is horizontal, and that north isn't really 'above' south; yet, the association of north with up and south with down influences people's tendency to prefer to travel south rather than north to go to a store, because north is uphill.

-- People with names that begin with the letter K were responsible for 10 percent of donations for Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, but for only 4 percent of donations to all disasters before Katrina.

-- People holding a warm drink rather than a cold one tend to be more trusting of strangers and more generous. In a less positive sense, the frequent sight of garbage, graffiti, and disrepair produces feelings of alienation and depression, especially among the elderly

-- People stepping off rising escalators are more helpful than those stepping off descending elevators. They are more generous, too. According to a study, twice as many people stepping off a rising escalator donated to a Salvation Army fundraiser than did those stepping off a descending elevator. Psychologists

theorize that we experience environmental conditions as metaphors -- in other words that we experience an elevated sense of ethics or generosity by gaining physical elevation.

The way we observe Judaism exerts not only a profound influence on ourselves but upon our children. Therefore, the Torah instructs us, "Choose life, in order that you and your offspring will live."(Deut. 30:19) Choose the life of Torah and mitzvot with joy. In doing so you will live a rich, meaningful, Jewishly-committed life, and also your children after you.

### *Quote of the Week*

I offer my opponents a bargain: If they will stop telling lies about us, I will stop telling the truth about them. -- *Adlai Stevenson, campaign speech, 1952*

### **Joke of the Week**

A mother and baby camel are talking one day when the baby camel asks, "Mom why have I got these huge three toed feet?" The mother replies, "Well son, when we trek across the desert your toes will help you to stay on top of the soft sand".

"OK" said the son. A few minutes later the son asks, "Mom, why have I got these great long eyelashes?" "They are there to keep the sand out of your eyes on the trips through the desert." "Thanks Mom" replies the son.

After a short while, the son returns and asks, "Mom, why have I got these great big humps on my back??"

The mother, now a little impatient with the boy replies, "They are there to help us store water for our long treks across the desert, so we can go without drinking for long periods."

"That's great mom, so we have huge feet to stop us sinking, and long eyelashes to keep the sand from our eyes and these humps to store water. But Mom?"

"Yes son?"

"Why are we in the St. Louis Zoo?"