

*Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Vayakhel February 21, 2014*

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

The story of Alan Swift's automobile is impressive. In 1928, while living in Springfield, Massachusetts, Mr. Swift's father gave him a 1928 Rolls-Royce Piccadilly P1 Roadster as a graduation present. The young man was passionate about his green-over-green soft top convertible, not only driving it on a regular basis, but maintaining it meticulously over the decades. Rolls-Royce acknowledged Mr. Swift in 1994, awarding him a crystal Spirit of Ecstasy award for his length of ownership. By 2005, Mr. Swift had logged more than 170,000 miles on its odometer and he was recognized as the oldest living person to have owned a car from new. Mr. Swift passed away that year at the age of 102. Much publicity was given to Mr. Swift's length of automobile ownership. But was his length of life any less remarkable?

When giving people a blessing for long life, we traditionally bless them to have a life of 120 years. Although living to the age of 120 years is exceedingly rare, we do see that it is not an absolute ideal. A shorter lifespan of any length is a dignified accomplishment when that life is lived in a meaningful, productive fashion. Great Torah personalities are described as 'having come with their days'; for example, "*And Abraham was old, he came with his days ...*" (Genesis 24:1) Rather than simply 'marking time', the lives of great people teach us the ideal of using and experiencing our days to the utmost.

Parshas Vayakhel -- Exodus 35:1 -- 38:20

Parshas Vayakhel begins with Moses assembling the entire nation of Israel and reiterates to them the commandment to observe the Shabbat. The nation is reminded that although the construction of the *Mishkan* is of transcendent importance, it does not take precedence over the weekly observance of Shabbat. He then conveys G-d's instructions regarding the details of the construction and fabrication of the *Mishkan* as described in the three previous Torah portions. The portion describes that the Jewish people came forward with their generous contributions for the *Mishkan's* construction, producing a surplus of supplies. The people donate the required materials in abundance, bringing gold, silver, copper, blue, purple and red-dyed wool, goat hair, spun linen, animal skins, wood, olive oil, herbs and precious stones. Moses has to tell them to stop giving.

The craftsmen, a team of wise-hearted artisans, are selected and the building begins. The construction includes three layers of roof coverings; 48 gold-plated wall panels, and 100 silver foundation sockets; the *Parochet* (Veil) that separates between the *Mishkan's* two chambers and the *Masach* (Screen) that fronts it; the Ark and its cover with the Cherubim; the Table and its Showbread; the seven-branched Menorah with its specially-prepared oil; and the Golden Altar and the Incense burned on it; the Anointing Oil; the outdoor Altar for Burnt Offerings and all its implements; the hangings, posts and foundation sockets for the Courtyard; and the Basin and its pedestal, made out of copper mirrors.

Rabbinic Ruminations

"Anchors Aweigh" is the fight song of the U.S. Naval Academy. "Anchoring" is a cognitive bias that describes the common human tendency to rely too heavily on the first piece of information offered (the "anchor") when making decisions. The "anchor" is irrelevant information used as a reference for evaluating or estimating some unknown value or information.

Here's an everyday example of anchoring: a friend asks how much you pay in rent for your 800-square-foot apartment, and then asks how much a 1,100-sq-ft apartment would cost to rent in the same building. Would you make an estimate by adding a little more to what you pay even if you've no idea of the actual costs? If so, you would be anchoring your estimate onto what you pay for your apartment.

A famous actual example of anchoring is the Williams-Sonoma bread maker. When it was the only option available and retailed for \$279, the bread maker generated little interest. Then Williams-Sonoma did something very clever -- and perhaps, manipulative. The store introduced a spiffier slicker model retailing at \$429. Nobody bought the fancy new one but sales of the original \$279 model doubled. They

flew off the shelves. So, what happened? Before Williams-Sonoma introduced the novel bread maker, nobody had any clue about how much a bread maker *should* cost: \$50? \$200? \$500? It was anyone's guess. The uncertainty made it difficult to evaluate how much it was worth. The introduction of the \$429 model enabled shoppers to compare prices and overnight the \$279 model became a bargain. Tennyson said, "A lie that is half-truth is the darkest of all lies." Beware of deception that enables bias. "*Charm is deceptive and beauty is naught; a G-d revering woman is the one to be praised.*" (Proverbs) Beauty, manipulation and machinations may capture our attention, but sterling character traits, a pure *neshama* (soul) and honesty are G-dly, and can capture our heart.

Quote of the Week

No. The real heroes wear camo. I'm not one of them. -- T.J. Oshie, St. Louis Blues hockey player, when called a hero after a U.S. Olympic hockey game.

Joke of the Week

An elderly woman walked into the local synagogue. The friendly usher greeted her at the door and helped her up the flight of steps.

"Where would you like to sit?" he asked politely.

"The front row, please," she answered.

"You really don't want to do that," the usher said. "The rabbi is really boring."

"Do you happen to know who I am?" the woman inquired.

"No," he said.

"I'm the rabbi's mother," she replied indignantly.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"Good," he answered. (thanks to Gary Sudin)