

*Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason  
Parshas Bechukosai May 16, 2014*

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates*

A British think tank looking at national well-being has released some research into the most satisfying careers. The most well-paid aren't the happiest, according to the results. Members of the clergy are the most satisfied of all. They're followed by highly paid chief executives, but at number four another low-paid profession, that of company secretary, pops up. Lowest on the rung of life satisfaction in the UK survey, out of 274 occupations, are plastics process operatives and bar staff.

The British results echo those of a similar 2006 American study. Firefighters, the clergy and others with professional jobs that involve helping or serving people were found to be more satisfied with their work and happier than those in other professions, according to results from a national survey. Tom Smith, survey director, said, "The most satisfying jobs are mostly professions, especially those involving caring for, teaching and protecting others and creative pursuits."

The happiest people do not necessarily have the 'best' things. They simply appreciate the things they have. This timeless idea is expressed in our tradition as follows: "Who is wealthy? The one who is happy with their lot." (Pirkei Avos 4:1)

*Bechukosai Leviticus 26:3 -- 27:34*

*Bechukosai*, the last Torah portion in the book of Leviticus, begins by briefly listing some of the blessings and rewards that the Jewish people will receive for diligently learning and following the Torah. The Portion then shifts to the subject matter which has made it famous -- G-d's admonitions and warnings of the consequences if the Jewish people abandon the Torah. Step by step, the Torah describes the tragedies which will befall the Jewish people if they abandon observance of the Torah, providing an eerie account of what has been part of our history to this day. There is good news, however; *teshuvah* (return or repentance) is possible at any time to avert an otherwise harsh decree. The book of Leviticus concludes with a brief discussion of tithes.

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

Some animals instinctively know how to change -- but none quite like the European eel. Female eels spawn in the Sargasso Sea (a region in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean) at a depth of 1,600 feet, whereupon they die. The transparent and hardly visible larvae hatch, at the size of about an inch, and migrate toward Europe in a 3-year-long trip, mainly drawn by the Gulf Stream. During their migration they reach the length of 3 inches, become more solid and round, but they are still largely transparent. As they approach the river deltas they change from saltwater fish into freshwater fish, and their bellies become yellow-brown, which is thought to act as camouflage and protect them from predators. They swim upstream into the rivers and lakes inland, reaching a length of 6 feet.

Six years later the eels return from the rivers to the sea. Those that lived in lakes will even leave the water and travel over moist ground cover to reach an ocean-bound stream. On the last leg of their journey in returning to the Sargasso Sea, the eel's body takes on a silver pigmentation and they return to being saltwater fish.

The European eel changes instinctively. Humans can also change. How? The *Sefer HaChinuch*, ("The Book of Instruction") a classic Jewish work on the 613 Commandments, writes: "A person is changed by his actions" (Mitzvah 16). We become the way we behave -- not immediately, but slowly, as the years progress and as our behavior becomes ingrained. Act in a certain way -- whether we mean it or not -- and it will become second nature. We will not only accustom ourselves to that behavior, but it will become who we are as well. It is in our hands to change our hearts.

### *Quote of the Week*

"I'm bored" is a useless thing to say. I mean, you live in a great, big, vast world . . . Even the inside of your own mind is endless; it goes on forever, inwardly, do you understand? That you're alive is amazing, so you don't get to say "I'm bored." -- *Louis C.K. (comedian, screenwriter, producer)*

### **Joke of the Week**

The children were lined up for lunch in the cafeteria of a Jewish elementary school. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The Rabbi made a note and posted on the apple tray: "Take only ONE. G-d is watching."

Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A child had written a note, "Take all you want. G-d is watching the apples."