

*Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason*  
*Parshas Tazrua-Metzora April 25, 2015*

*“Woman Searching for Biological Mother Discovers Co-Worker is her Mom!”*

A 38-year-old woman's quest to find her birth mother ended in a surprising place -- the company where she works. La-Sonya Mitchell-Clark requested records that were made available recently by the Ohio Department of Health. When she learned her mother's name is Francine Simmons, La-Sonya looked her up on Facebook. In an incredible twist of fate, she saw that her mother worked at InfoCision, a teleservices provider. La-Sonya had worked at InfoCision for four years, while her mother had been there for ten years.

La-Sonya knew of an employee named Francine. She reached out to her, and the next day, got the long-awaited phone call. "I said, 'I think I'm your daughter,'" La-Sonya said. For her part, Francine said she always wanted to connect with the daughter she gave up as a 15-year-old mother but didn't know how. "I'm still in shock," Francine said. "It's amazing." The two live only a few minutes from each other in Youngstown. It turns out La-Sonya has three sisters she didn't know about -- and one of them works at InfoCision as well. She said her adoptive parents have always been supportive of her. "[They've] always encouraged me to look for them. They're going to be a part of this, too." Francine, speaking of her new-found daughter, said, "Now, we've got a bigger, extended family where we can just be together."

The term "twist of fate" refers to a random occurrence with far-reaching consequences. But are there such things as random occurrences? While few of us have unexpectedly met a long-lost sibling, our lives are filled with frequent 'small miracles'. In our daily prayers we thank G-d for "Your miracles which are with us daily, and for Your continual wonders and kindnesses." Because we become accustomed to life and nature, we rarely see the levers and pulleys of the small and hidden miracles that surround us. In *Proverbs* King Solomon said, "*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole of its decision is from the LORD*" (16:33). Everything that happens in the world is made to work out according to a Divine purpose. G-d is certainly with us and speaks with us. We need only to open our eyes and see.

*Parshas Tazria / Metzora Leviticus 12:1 -- 15:33*

Parshas Tazria describes in great detail the varying manifestations of the disease called *tzara'as*. Although it has commonly been mistranslated as leprosy, this skin disease bears little resemblance to any bodily ailment transmitted through normal exposure. Rather, *tzara'as* is the physical manifestation of a spiritual malaise, a punishment from G-d primarily for the sin of speaking *loshon hara*. *Loshon hara*, meaning literally 'the evil tongue', is often translated as 'gossip'. However, *loshon hara* is the Hebrew term for derogatory speech that is true. *Motzei shem rah* refers to derogatory speech about others that is false and slanderous.

The *metzora* (one diagnosed with *tzara'as*) was to be sent into isolation, tear his garments, and to call out 'contaminated, contaminated!' Since he abused his power of speech, sowing strife and distancing people from one another, it was fitting that he too should suffer the effects of isolation. Parshas Metzora continues the discussion of *tzara'as*, detailing the purification process of the *metzora*. *Tzara'as* could afflict one's clothing and home, and necessitate the burning of one's clothes and demolishing of one's home if the disease spread. The various punishments recorded in the Torah are not intended to serve as revenge for the sin; they are measures that will hopefully restore the person to the correct path.

*Rabbinic Ruminations*

A *pollyanna* is described as someone who remembers only happy events, believes everyone in the world is completely beautiful, and looks on the bright side of everything, including misfortune. Based upon the Eleanor Porter novel '*Pollyanna*', *pollyanna* soon became the common label for optimists, and began at times to carry the pejorative connotation of being irrepressibly or excessively optimistic. The *Pollyanna Hypothesis* asserts that there is a universal human tendency to use evaluative positive words more frequently and diversely than evaluative negative words in communicating. A new study finds that across multiple languages and in many modes, human communication skews towards the positive.

The study, led by mathematician Peter Dobbs, examined individual words from 10 diverse languages and 24 source types including books, news and social media, websites, music lyrics, and television and movie subtitles. Researchers pinpointed about 10,000 frequently used words in English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Korean, Chinese (simplified), Russian, Indonesian and Arabic. The team then paid native speakers to rate words by assigning them a smiling or frowning face; in all, some 500 million human scores were obtained. Dr. Dobbs said, “. . . in every source we looked at, people use more positive words than negative ones.” The researchers think that their study, published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, suggests language itself has a sense of positivity built in at its core ([Dodds et al., 2015](#)).

Abraham Lincoln once said, “We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses.” Not surprisingly, Judaism encourages us to choose to see the good in things and in people. This is called having an *ayin tovah*, literally, a “good eye.” Ethics of the Fathers (5:22) teaches: “Those who have a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul are among the disciples of our forefather Avraham.” Positive and negative are directions. Which direction do you choose?

### *Quote of the Week*

Be less curious about people and more curious about ideas. -- **Marie Curie** (*Polish and Naturalized-French Physicist and Chemist*)

### **Joke of the Week**

It's the Maccabiah Games in Tel Aviv and just before their race, an American sprinter asks an Israeli opponent, "So what's your best time for the 100 meters?"

"Just over 8 seconds," replies the Israeli.

"But the world record is around 9 seconds," says the astonished American.

"Yes," says the Israeli, "but I know a short cut."