

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Tazria March 28, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

All those hard-to-break vaults you've seen in movies are nothing compared to the Antwerp Diamond Vault. The vault in Belgium is considered the most impenetrable safe in the world. Housing 70% of the world's diamonds, the Antwerp Diamond Vault is outfitted with un-matched security equipment including; heat detectors, Doppler radar, seismic sensors, magnetic fields, and a lock with over 100 million possible combinations designed to shut down for hours if the wrong code is entered in twice. Furthermore, the door itself is three tons, constructed of solid steel, and would require 12-hours of non-stop drilling to penetrate.

But guess what happened in 2003? A ring of Italian thieves known as "The School of Turin" broke in and stole \$100 million worth of diamonds and other treasures! In true "Oceans 11" style, they set off no alarms and Antwerp officials weren't aware of the breach until the next morning when they arrived at the Diamond Center and discovered their safe gaping open and ransacked. The booty was never found, but police did arrest one man based on DNA evidence found on a half-eaten sandwich (pastrami? corned beef? tuna?) at the scene. The Antwerp Diamond Center has since upped its security even more, yet it seems the 2003 incident has shown that even the most sophisticated vault is no match for a truly determined criminal mastermind.

Everyone seeks security. Where can reliable, unshakable security be found, particularly in troubled times? King David advises: "The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know Your name trust in You, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you." (Psalm 9:10-11)

Parshas Tazria Leviticus 12:1 -- 13:59

Parshas Tazria describes in great detail the varying and numerous 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. 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

Who is really smarter, college students or preschoolers? In one case, a simple test of logic produced a surprising win for 4 and 5-year olds over college students. In a test of learning and reasoning, 170 college undergrads were put up against 106 four and five-year olds. Both groups had to try to figure out a game called 'Blickets', which was invented for the study. The game was simple enough for the preschoolers to understand and only involved watching researchers put simple clay objects, like cylinders, pyramids and cubes, onto a box. Then the box either lit up and played some music or didn't. From the objects that were put on the box, participants had to work out which objects were 'blickets'; in other words which objects or combinations had the power to make the box light up.

Preschoolers were much more likely than the college students to notice that sometimes unusual combinations of objects would make the box light up. One of the study's authors wrote, ""The kids got it. They figured out that the machine might work in this unusual way and so that you should put both blocks

on together. But the best and brightest students acted as if the machine would always follow the common and obvious rule, even when we showed them that it might work differently.” Unlike preschoolers, even the smartest young adults were less likely to entertain new theories, even in the face of new evidence. The researchers concluded that: “The very fact that children know less to begin with may, paradoxically, make them better, or at least more open-minded, learners. The plasticity of early beliefs may help to explain the bold exploration and breathtaking innovation that characterizes children’s learning.”

The above-mentioned study finds support in classic Jewish literature. Ethics of the Fathers states: *One who studies Torah as a child, to what is he compared? To ink written on fresh paper. And one who studies Torah as an old man, to what is he compared? To ink written on blotted paper.*” Young minds are remarkable in their ability to adapt to new situations and surroundings. This is true on a scholastic level as well as a religious and spiritual plane. Teach your children well; the younger you start, the better.

Quote of the Week

If you stay in your comfort zone, you aren't really living -- ***Kolohe Andino***

Joke of the Week

A Scoutmaster was teaching his Boy Scouts about survival in the Alaskan wilderness.

"What are the three most important things you should bring with you in case you get lost alone in the woods?" he asked. Several hands went up, and a number of important items were mentioned, such as water, matches, etc. Then one little boy in the back eagerly raised his hand.

"Yes, Timmy, what are the three most important things you would bring?" asked the Scoutmaster.

Timmy replied, "A compass, food, and a deck of cards."

"Why's that, Timmy?" the Scoutmaster inquired.

"The compass is to find the right direction, and the food is to maintain you during the rescue."

"And what about the playing cards, Timmy?" asked the Scoutmaster impatiently.

"Well, sir, as soon as you start playing solitaire, someone always walks up behind you and says, "Put that red nine on top of that black ten!"