



CIRCLE TIME

AT YOUR
Shabbos Table

...FOR A Meaningful and Entertaining SHABBOS WITH YOUR CHILDREN...

פרשת ויגש

CONTENTS

- # 1 **DVAR TORAH IN A STORY**
- # 1 **PARSHAH RIDDLES**
- # 2 **CHOLENT STORY**
- # 2 **LITVAK, CHASSID, SEPHARDI**
- # 2 **PERSONAL GROWTH AVODAH**
- # 3 **ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S RIDDLES**
- # 4 **HAFTORAH FROM THE HEADLINES**
- # 5 **UP FOR DISCUSSION**
- # 6 **GEMATRIA**
- # 7 **THIS DATE IN JEWISH HISTORY**
- # 7 **HALACHAH**
- # 7 **THE LAST WORD**

DVAR TORAH IN A STORY >> **THE SECRET MITZVAH**

How did the brothers not realize that the king of Egypt standing before them was none other than Yosef? So many of his actions could only make sense if it was he!

In the town of Shedova, there lived an “enlightened” Jew by the name of Yeshaya Levitan. Although he did keep mitzvos, Mr. Levitan was a proud and wealthy intellectual who considered himself upper-class and took pride in his secular opinions and worldview.

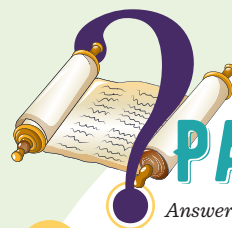
One summer, a young college student from nearby St. Petersburg, known only as Dudov, came to stay at the Levitan home in Shedova. Dudov was Jewish but had strayed from Judaism. He was also a very disturbed person and was always sad, angry, and depressed. Mr. Levitan gave him a nice bedroom on the second floor, directly over the family sitting room.

As the summer progressed, Dudov’s mood went from bad to worse, until it finally ended in a terrible tragedy. He stopped coming out of his room, and by them time Mr. Levitan called emergency services to break the door down and check on him, it was too late.

Dudov was buried in a sad ceremony at the local cemetery, and the Levitan family tried to recover. But a few nights later, strange things began happening.

The Levitans were relaxing in the sitting room one evening, when a ceiling tile fell and shattered on the floor. Minutes later, another followed. Throughout the night, as the family cowered in their beds, pieces of the ceiling came crashing down. The house had become dangerous!

Mr. Levitan sent for a



PARSHAH RIDDLES

Answers to this week’s riddles will appear in next week’s issue.

- 1 **How many times in the Torah does it say that someone was “*vayigash*—and he came close” to say something? Which halachah is based on these three uses of the word? Which other “*vayigashes*” are there in *Chumash*?**
- 2 **Which two times did someone’s style of speech show his identity?**
- 3 **Can you find eight times that Yosef cried?**
- 4 **Which two aspects of Binyamin’s future are hinted at in the *parshah*?**
- 5 **Which six times in *Chumash Bereishis* did someone say/threaten “I will die”?**





SERIAL >> **NEW STORY!**

CHOLENT STORY

A story told in parts, designed to get children to come back to the table for the main dish!



There was a time in history known as the Middle Ages. During that period, Europe was populated mostly by cities and villages scattered throughout the countryside. Each town was ruled by a wealthy and powerful nobleman who owned most of the land and rented it to peasant farmers and workers. Although there were kings of entire regions, the noblemen pretty much did as they pleased.

Our story begins in 1539, during the time that the Maharal and Maharshal were guiding the great *kehillah* of Prague, Czech Republic.

Far away from Prague, in the town of Lunchitz, Poland, there lived a Jewish couple who worked as farmers on a piece of land that they rented from the local nobility. The man's name was R' Aharon. He was a great *yerei Shamayim* and spent every spare moment learning Torah, eventually writing the *sefer Vavei Ha'amudim*. He also spent a lot of time saying Tehillim, for although R' Aharon and his wife had great *bracha* in their lives, they also experienced pain. R' Aharon's business did fairly well. He was able to plant a good crop of wheat each year, harvest it, and sell it. People liked his wheat because it was good quality and made good flour and delicious bread. But R' Aharon and his wife had not been blessed with a child.

The couple were pleased that they were able to support themselves and even give *tzedakah*, but they wanted so much to have a child, to raise him to Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. But only Hashem decides how to distribute His *brachos*. Some people have enough to eat, some have children, and some are *zocheh* to see children grow up to be *tamidei chachamim*. Rarely does anyone have all the *brachos* at the same time.

One year, after R' Aharon and his wife had been married for over 20 years, the weather in Lunchitz was odd. There was too much rain, and the wheat crop was soggy. Some of it got infected by a fungus and did not grow well. After an entire season of work, R' Aharon's crop was of poor quality, and no one wanted to buy it. R' Aharon struggled to find buyers, and he was forced to lower the price again and again. Soon, it became clear that he would not have enough money to pay the rent to the local nobleman.

A month went by without payment. This was a dangerous situation. Noblemen were not very noble when it came to money. People who could not pay suffered terribly. R' Aharon was concerned, but he trusted that whatever Hashem decided would be was for the best.

Another month went by. Sure enough, a day after the rent was due, one of the nobleman's men rapped loudly on the door of R' Aharon's house at the edge of the field he rented.

"Listen here!" he shouted at the couple. "You have already missed two months' rent. The nobleman demands payment immediately!"

"Please tell the nobleman that I am so sorry. I cannot pay the rent now because this year's crop failed. I will not be able to pay it until next year's crop is harvested. Please ask him for an extension."

"He will not be happy!" Apparently, the messenger only knew how to shout. "No way am I telling him that! If you want to ask for an extension, go talk to him yourself. And good luck with *that!*"

TO BE CONTINUED...

DVAR TORAH >>

LITVAK, CHASSID, SEPHARDI

Three different angles on a dvar Torah, one each from Litvish, Chassidic, and Sephardic sources. Can be split between the three seduos.

אָדְנֵי שָׂאֵל אֶת עַבְדָּיו לְאֹמֶר הֲיֵשׁ לָכֶם אָב אוֹ אָח

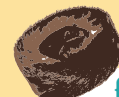
"My master asked his servants: Do you have a father or brother?" (*Bereishis 44:19*).

What was Yehudah's point in saying this? Additionally, we don't even find that Yosef asked them that question!



RAV YOSEF SHALOM ELYASHIV:

Yosef was claiming that Binyamin had to stay as a slave because he could not possibly pay (*kefel*) for the goblet he stole, which was priceless because it was magical and Yosef could "see" with it. Yehudah was saying, "It's a hoax! If he could "see" in his goblet, he should have known about our father and brother without our telling him!"



OTZAR PENINEI HACHASSIDUS:

Yehudah was talking to Hashem, not to Yosef. He was referring to a time far in the future when Hashem would offer a chance for Avraham and Yaakov to defend the Jewish people and they would decline to do so. Yehudah said to Hashem, "My Master (Hashem) asked His servants (Klal Yisrael): Do you have a father (Avraham, called *av hamon goyim* [father of many nations]) or brother (Yaakov, called a brother to Eisav) to defend you?" Yehudah continued: "No, but we have an old Father, older than both of them, Who will defend us—You, Hashem! So please save us now!"



DON YITZCHAK ABARBANEL:

Yehudah was asking a rhetorical question. It is meant to be read as, "Did you ask about our father or brother? No. We offered the information. That proves that we are not spies or thieves, because a liar does not voluntarily offer any information."



Parshah summary

Parshas Vayigash is about trusting Hashem's direction of events. World history, national history, and our personal history are all carefully choreographed and executed by Hashem. The *parshah* teaches that although events may seem mysterious, random, meaningless, cruel, or frustrating while we are living them, there is a unifying purpose for everything and a grand scheme of things. One day, we will know it and see it; today, we trust in it, because Hashem has shown us His faithfulness numerous times.

In the *parshah*, all the mysterious troubles that the brothers were put through become crystal clear with two simple words: "*Ani Yosef*—I am Yosef." *Chazal* tell us that our own experience at the end of days will be similar: all our complaints will melt on our tongues in an instant. Yosef tells the brothers that their sale of him is really part of Hashem's plan to support them during the famine, and we already know that it is part of a much larger scheme: to bring Klal Yisrael to Mitzrayim for a necessary *tikkun*. The *parshah* then tracks Yaakov and his family's descent to Mitzrayim, their long-term strategy to avoid assimilation (establishing a yeshivah, shepherding), and persecution (presentation to Pharaoh) while there. Then world events are shown: the world's finances all coalesce under Yosef's control in a mountain of riches that will pass through the kings of Yehudah for generations.

PERSONAL GROWTH AVODAH OF THE WEEK

This section views the procession of *parshiyos* and *Yamim Tovim* as a ladder for personal growth. It identifies a theme in the *parshah* and a related area that needs growth, and assigns a weekly mission based upon it.

AVODAH OF THE WEEK:

1. Take a hard look at the major events of your life in the past five or 10 years. Can you find trends that are for your benefit in the broader picture? Can you remember the bewilderment at the time you were experiencing a certain event and did not have the benefit of hindsight?
2. Try to guess at what Hashem may have in store for the future of those trends. Then work on reminding yourself that only Hashem knows what is best, and even if your guesses are wrong, He is still running the show for your benefit.
3. Tell your family a true story about someone who discovered that a difficult event turned out for the best.

RIDDLE ANSWERS:

1. Avraham was "*vayigash*" to *daven* for Sedom's deliverance (ibid. 18:22), Yehudah was "*vayigash*" to plead with Yosef (ibid. 44:18), and Eliyahu Hanavi was "*vayigash*" to *daven* at Har Hacarmel (*Melachim I* 18:36). This is the source of the three steps forward at the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei*. Yaakov was also "*vayigash*" to kiss Yitzchak (*Bereishis* 27:27) and to roll the stone off the well (ibid. 29:10).
2. Yaakov's respectful style of speech tipped off Yitzchak that he was not Eisav, and Yosef told his brothers that his language proved that he was a Jew (Rashi explains that he was referring to the use of *Lashon Kodesh*, but others say he was pointing to his constant references to "*Elokim*").
3.
 1. מבכד ויסב מעליהם ויבך
 2. מגל ויבא החדרה ויבך שמה
 3. מהב ויתן את קלו בככי וישמעו מצרים
 4. מהייד ויפיל על צוארי בנימן אחיו ויבך
 5. מהטו וינשק לכל אחיו ויבך עליהם
 6. מוכט ויעל לקראת ישראל אביו... ויפיל על צואריו ויבך
4. נא ויפיל יוסף על פני אביו ויבך עליו
נא ויבך יוסף בְּבָרָם אֵלָיו
5. Yosef cried on Binyamin's "necks"—the two Batei Mikdash which would be destroyed in his territory; and he gave him five suits of clothing for the five types of royal garments that his descendant Mordechai would wear.

והיה כל מצאיי יהרגני
Rivkah:
למה זה אנכי
Rivkah:
קצתי בחיי... למה לי חיים
Rochel:
הבה לי בנים ואם אין מתה אנכי
Yaakov:
ארד אל בני אבל שאלה
Yaakov:
אמותה הפעם אחרי ראותי את פניך

Did you notice that the story of the haftorah, besides relating to the depth of the parshah or day, usually sounds like it is right out of current events?

HAFTORAH FROM THE HEADLINES

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

The haftorah describes Yechezkel Hanavi's demonstration predicting the reunion of the split kingdoms of Yehudah and Yisrael.

After the death of Shlomo Hamelech, his son Rechavam lost control of a large part of the nation. Led by Yeravam, a descendant of Yosef, 10 Shevatim broke away and formed their own kingdom. The two kingdoms remained separate, at times warring, until today, when *Malchus Yisrael* is completely lost to us.

Yechezkel is commanded to choose two wooden blocks and write on one "Yosef and Co.," and on the other "Yehudah and Co." The Navi then travels among the people, holding the two blocks together. When asked, he explains that it is a demonstration of the times of Mashiach, when the split nation will be united under *malchus beis Dovid*. They will live in peace, harmony, prosperity, and holiness, keeping Torah and mitzvos in purity and united in Eretz Yisrael.

CONNECTION TO THE PARSHAH

In the *parshah*, the forerunners of the two kingdoms face off in battle until all the animosity suddenly disappears. Yehudah, king of the Shevatim, crosses figurative swords with Yosef, also a king. Just when the situation seems headed for utter destruction, Yosef makes the first move toward peace (as Mashiach ben Yosef will precede Mashiach ben Dovid), and the contentious atmosphere evaporates in a moment.

RIPPED FROM THE HEADLINES

The continued lack of Jewish unity remains a point of pain for the Jewish people and Jewish communities around the world. In some places, politics continue to drive deep wedges (such as in the case of Israel, which is spiraling toward new elections), and in others, the handling of COVID-19 has increased misunderstanding between communities. It is up to us to work on our *ahavas Yisrael*, but true unity will come with Mashiach, *b'meheirah*!

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

contractor to check the ceiling, but there was nothing wrong with it. A builder, a plumber, a roofer, and other experts could find no problems with the house. They checked the floor above—Dudov's old room—and there was no problem there.

But the next night, pieces of ceiling continued falling.

And the next. And the next. Every night, as soon as the sun set, pieces of the ceiling below Dudov's room flaked away and fell.

Yeshaya Levitan and his buddies decided to get to the bottom of this story. They thought someone must be sneaking into the rooms and causing trouble. So one night, Mr. Levitan and his friends sealed the house. They locked all entrances, searched all the rooms, and made sure the place was empty. They posted guards at every door and then gathered in the sitting room to wait and play cards.

They did not have to wait long. As soon as night fell, a large block plummeted from the ceiling above the sofa, just missing one of the card players.

"This place is haunted!" the man shouted and ran screaming out of house, yelling all the way down the road.

Mr. Levitan was now convinced that there was some supernatural force at work. He had all the *mezuzos* in the house checked, got every male to wear a *tallis* all day, and tried every *segulah* against *sheidim* he had ever heard of. But the ceiling kept crumbling every night.

The Levitans were at their wits' end.

The rabbi of the city of Shedova at the time was Rav Yosef Leib Bloch, the Telshe *rosh yeshivah* and author of *Shiurei Da'as*. A member of the Levitan household suggested that they consult with the Rabbi.

Rav Bloch listened carefully to the story. "I'm no expert on *segulos*," he said finally. "By I can tell you what it says in halachah. When Dudov tragically ended his life in that room, some of the floorboards, joists, and girders may have absorbed blood. Those things require *kevurah*. I would advise you to remove them from the house and have them buried."

The Levitans quickly hired a contractor to replace the beams in question and bury them. Many of Mr. Levitan's friends came to watch the process and to see what would happen.

Sure enough, the mysterious ceiling deterioration stopped, and all was peaceful in the Levitan home.

The people who had followed the story were greatly inspired, and many grew closer to believing in the spiritual force of the universe and began keeping mitzvos.

In the *sefer Shiurei Da'as*, Rav Bloch relates the incident and adds a note about one young man who refused to be present while the contractor was working, didn't want to hear about the story, and denied that anything had happened. "I don't want to hear about it!" he said. "I don't want to believe! I don't want to have to keep mitzvos!"

It's amazing, Rav Bloch writes, how a person can refuse to see the truth in front of their eyes when they know that it will force them to admit to a reality that they prefer to deny.

The sefer Degel Mussar explains the Shevatim's actions this way as well. They could not accept that Yosef had actually become king and could not see that truth.



OUT FOR DISCUSSION

See this week's *Circle* magazine for the full comic story and halachic dilemma.

THE LUCKY LAWN MOWER

A person who is hired to do a job is allowed to hire someone else to do it if it is the kind of job where it is normal to do this and if the other person can be expected to do a good job. If the person they hire agrees to accept a smaller payment than the first person had agreed to, the first person can keep the extra money.

Therefore, Moshe can keep the extra five dollars.



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Yehudah tells Yosef: כִּי כְמוֹךָ כִּפְרֹעָה – you are short-lived, just like Pharaoh! I will kill you both!

אָלְקִים is *middas hadin*

אָלְקִים = 68 = כְּמוֹךָ. *middas hadin* is also short-lived.

THIS DATE IN JEWISH HISTORY



city of Mezhibuzh

During Teves 5408 (January 1647) the Chmielnicki Uprising was rampaging through Europe. Thousands of Jews were lost to the terrible pogroms committed by the violent Cossacks. These are called the *Gezeiros Tach V'Tat* (since they took place in the years ט'ת and ת'ת).

On 11 Teves of that year, a mob of bloodthirsty Cossacks descended upon the Jews of Mezhibuzh. The community took shelter in the fortified shul building. A simple Jewish tailor named Mordechai and his wife, Esther, roused the *kehillah* to fast, *daven*, and do *teshuvah*. When the Cossacks surrounded the building and laid siege to it, Mordechai climbed on a high wall and blew a shofar. Mysteriously, the Cossacks fled in panic, and the *kehillah* was saved.

The event was later commemorated as *Purim of Mezhibuzh*. The Ohev Yisrael of Apt ז"ל, who late in his life lived in Mezhibuzh, would not recite *Tachanun* on this date. Some chassidim have a custom not to say *Tachanun*.



HALACHAH

Asarah B'Teves on a Friday

WHICH FASTS CAN BE FASTED ON A FRIDAY?

All public fasts are postponed if they fall on Friday or Shabbos, except Yom Kippur (which can never fall on a Friday anyway) and Asarah B'Teves. According to the Avudraham, if Asarah B'Teves would fall on Shabbos (with our calendar, it can't), we would fast on that Shabbos! Certain optional public fast days (such as the *yahrtzeit* of a tsaddik, Erev Rosh Chodesh, Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, and the 20th of Sivan) may fall on Friday. One should not make personal fast days on a Friday, but may do so in a limited fashion.

WHY IS ASARAH B'TEVES DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER RABBINIC FAST DAYS?

Both Asarah B'Teves and Yom Kippur are referred to in the Torah with the words "b'tzem hayom hazeh" (*Yechezkel* 24:2, *Vayikra* 23:28), which teaches that they cannot be postponed. There are several reasons that the halachos of the Tenth of Teves are stricter than those of the other fasts: 1) *Chazal* say, "Aschalta d'paranusa adifa—The beginning of trouble is the worst part of it." On Asarah B'Teves, Nevuchadnetzar laid siege to Yerushalayim. This was the very beginning of all the tragedies commemorated in the other fast days. 2) The Chasam Sofer writes that on this day, the *Beis Din shel Ma'alah* decreed the destruction of the Beis

Hamikdash, and on each year in which it is not rebuilt, the *Beis Din* reconvenes and renews the decree on this day. 3) Asarah B'Teves is a condensation of three days of fasting: 8 and 9 Teves should also be fast days. The Torah was translated into Greek on 8 Teves, Esther was taken to Achashveirosh, Ezra Hasofer and several other tzaddikim died, and the leader of Christianity was born on 9 Teves.

WHEN DOES THE FAST END?

Chazal were concerned that being in a state of fasting during the first moments of Shabbos is a violation of *oneg Shabbos*. Halachically, we do finish the fast, but many *daven* Minchah early so that they can make Kiddush at exactly the moment of *tzeis hakochavim* (halachic nightfall). Many follow the earliest available listing for that *zman*. *Kabbalas Shabbos* and Maariv may be recited early. One who is really hungry should delay singing *Shalom Aleichem* until after *Hamotzi*. One should not wait until after seven p.m. to recite Kiddush even if that is their usual *minhag*.

WHAT HAPPENS AT MINCHAH?

Aneinu is said, but *Tachanun* and *Avinu Malkeinu* are not. Some communities do not read from the Torah or haftarah, but the prevailing custom is that we do so. Another reason Minchah should be said early is to

allow time for the long *tefillah* before Shabbos and to avoid wearing Shabbos clothing while saying prayers of mourning. Some wear *tefillin* at Minchah on every fast day—they must *daven* early.

ARE SHABBOS PREPARATIONS AFFECTED?

No, even those who do not bathe or cut hair on a fast day should do so *lichvod Shabbos*. One should not listen to music. For those who are *makpid* to do *to'amehah* (taste some of the Shabbos food on Friday), some allow tasting the Shabbos food without swallowing—one should spit it out after tasting.

WHAT ARE THE HALACHOS OF PERSONAL FASTS ON FRIDAY?

One should not accept personal fast days (such as on the *yahrtzeit* of a parent or a *ta'anis chalom*) on a Friday, but may do so in a limited fashion. One may not fast into Shabbos, but should be *mekabel* Shabbos early and break the fast before nightfall. Some *poskim* advise doing so even on an optional public fast day; the custom is to finish the fast. It is best to avoid saying any formal *kabbalas ta'anis* (acceptance of a fast day) at Thursday Minchah to eliminate the possibility of violating a *neder* (vow). Alternatively, one can accept upon themselves to fast only until Maariv, even if *davened* early.

THE LAST WORD

A one-liner worth remembering

"FOR SOMEONE WHO HAS QUESTIONS, THERE ARE ANSWERS. BUT FOR SOMEONE FILLED WITH ANSWERS*, THERE ARE NO ANSWERS!"

—Rav Chaim Brisker

*i.e. excuses



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