



CIRCLE TIME

AT YOUR
Shabbos Table

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

פרשת בהר - בחוקותי

CONTENTS

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

DVAR TORAH IN A STORY >> THE RENTED GRAVE

...וְחַי אִחִיךָ עִמָּךְ. אֶת כַּסְפְּךָ לֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ בְּנִשְׁךָ...

"That your brother may live with you. You should not give him your money in interest" (Vayikra 25:36-37)

It was dangerous to challenge R. Akiva Eiger, rabbi of the city of Posen, but some people did not seem to get that.

One powerful man, rushing to rebuild his house after a fire, allowed construction to continue even on Shabbos. R. Akiva ordered him to stop, but he ignored the order.

When the house was just about finished, it collapsed, having been eaten by termites and mold.

Another man refused to give his wife a *get*. Rabbi Akiva reminded him that a woman can be freed either with a *get* or the death of her husband. The man laughed, walked away... and suffered a heart attack.

This story is about a particular fellow who had a profitable business as a money lender. He issued loans to people and collected *ribbis*, interest, in clear violation of the Torah's command. Obviously, in his miserly ways, he did not give much charity, either.

After warning him to stop a number of times, Rabbi Akiva Eiger had a private meeting with the town's burial service, the *chevra kaddisha*.

Some time passed, and the *ribbis*-lending man grew older. He began to make preparations for his passing and wished to purchase a burial plot for himself. The place to make those arrangements was the office of the *chevra kaddisha*. He made an appointment, visited the office, chose a plot, and came to pay.

"That will be a hundred thousand marks," the clerk said, quoting an astronomical figure, many times the amount

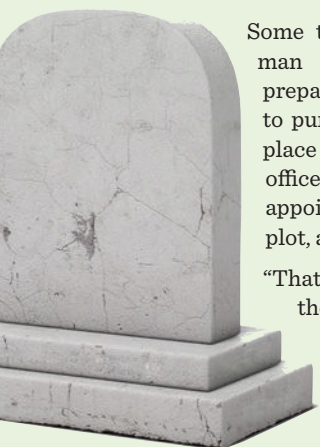
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PARSHAH RIDDLES

Answers to this week's riddles appear on page 3.

- 1** The Torah does not use the word שמיטה in the *parshah*. What word does it use instead? Where is the only time it uses the word שמיטה when teaching its *halachos*? Concerning what other subject does it use the word שמיטה?
- 2** The *parshah* talks about תלכו and בחקתי תמאסו. Where does the Torah talk about (the *shoresh* of) בחקת תלכו לא?
- 3** Which two ערנין are the same amount?
- 4** Which three *parshiyos* talk about the *halachos* of an ענד עברי without using those words? Which *parshah* mentions the words ענד עברי but does not talk about its *halachos*? Which uses the words ענד עברי?
- 5** What word in the Torah contains four *pasachs* (־) in a row? Which has four *kamatzes*?
- 6** In what four situations is an ancestral field (שדה אחוזה) lost to its *shevet* forever, and does not go back to its original owner at *yovel*?



CHOLENT STORY

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

Recap: Shlomo Efraim moves to Lvov and leads the life of a hidden tzaddik, known as Efraim the Egg Man. In Prague, the Maharal passes away.

The city of Prague was thrown into mourning.

The great *talmid chacham* and leader, *kadosh* and *tahor*, Rav Yehudah Loew, the Maharal, had passed away. The many *sefarim* he had written still lined the shelves of the shul—and would soon be in nearly every shul in the world—but his seat was empty.

Who would fill it?

After the time of *shivah* and *sheloshim* had passed, the community leaders gathered to discuss the role of Chief Rabbi of Prague and the famous Altneushule. A committee was formed.

At its first meeting, the committee examined the will and last papers of the Maharal. Their great *rav* had left them specific instructions, and an envelope.

“Take this envelope to the city of Lvov,” the Maharal’s instructions read. “Do not open it. Deliver it to a man living there who goes by the name of Efraim Olelos. He will help you.”

The committee chose two of its most distinguished members to travel to Lvov to meet the mystery man to whom the Maharal referred. They were sure he would become the new *rav* of the city and sent only their best to greet him for the first time.

The two traveled to Lvov and began asking around the city for a great *talmid chacham* named Efraim Olelos. They were greeted with blank stares.

“No one here by that name, sirs,” they heard again and again. They searched high and low. They looked for an Efraim, an Olelos, any *talmid chacham* by a similar name. They were sure that the Maharal’s appointed successor was a great *gaon*.

Nothing.

After a few days, the frustrated dignitaries sat at a table in the hotel in which they were staying. No one had heard of Efraim Olelos, *talmid chacham* or otherwise. They were ready to give up, but they consulted the proprietor of the hotel one more time.

“Are you sure there is no Efraim Olelos in town?”

“Look, I’ve told you a number of times, I don’t know everyone in Lvov, but I’ve never heard that name!”

Just then, the kitchen door swung open, and a worker stepped through. He caught the last few words of the conversation.

“Did you say you were looking for Efraim Olelos?” he asked.

“Yes, a great *talmid chacham* by that name!” the men jumped up excitedly. “Do you know him?”

“I don’t know about a *talmid chacham*, but I’m sure I’ve seen that name somewhere.... Just a moment.”

The man disappeared through the swinging kitchen door. After seemingly never-ending minutes, he emerged with a paper in his hand.

“Here it is,” he said. “I knew I had seen it someplace,” he handed the paper to the men, who looked at it. It was a contract for the delivery of eggs to the hotel kitchen. The bottom of the paper bore the signature of the egg man...Efraim Olelos.

“Everyone calls him Efraim the Egg Man,” the worker explained. “I didn’t even know his real name.”

The dignitaries were a bit surprised, to say the least. Their new *rav* was an egg man? But the Maharal’s instructions were clear. Off they went to visit the address on the contract.

Arriving at the home of the egg man, they beheld a poor, simple dwelling. Shlomo Efraim’s wife answered their knock and showed them to the room in which he was learning. He quickly stowed his Gemara.

The men handed him the letter from the Maharal. As Shlomo Efraim read it, his eyes filled with tears. Reaching the end, he stood, as is the halachah, and tore his cloak and shirt. For it was clear from the letter and the presence of the men before him that his great *rebbe*, the Maharal of Prague, had passed on to the *Yeshiva shel Ma’alah*.

The letter left him no choice. Shlomo Efraim shook hands with the two representatives of the community and promised to arrive in Prague in six months. The men gave him a large amount of money to purchase clothing and prepare to move to Prague. But the Satan was not yet done.

At the conclusion of six months, the city of Prague prepared a major parade to greet the new *rav*, but he did not come. Two weeks went by, and still, there was no sign of Shlomo Efraim. The two dignitaries set out again for Lvov, to find out what had happened.

Upon arrival, they discovered Shlomo Efraim sitting in jail, and his wife distraught! Soon after the men had left, there had been a robbery in town. Shlomo Efraim had been seen spending an unusual amount of money, and suspicion immediately fell on him. He had been arrested and held ever since!

The two men rushed to the courthouse, testified that they had given the money to Shlomo Efraim, and had him released. A short time later, he and his family moved to the city in which his Jewish life had begun.

Shlomo Efraim of Luncitz served as the *rav* of the city of Prague for many years. He published many *sefarim* on halachah, Chumash, and other topics; including *Olelos Efraim*, and his most famous, a commentary on Chumash by which he is known until today: the *Kli Yakar*.

THE END

DVAR TORAH >>

ŁITVAK, CHASSID, SEPHARDI

Three different angles on a *dvar Torah*, one each in classic Litvish, Chassidic, and Sephardic styles. Can your children guess which idea comes from which school of thought!

וְכִי תֵאמְרוּ מָה נֹאכֵל בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׂבִיעִתָּהּ הֵן לֹא נִזְרַע וְלֹא נִאָּסַף אֶת תְּבוּאָתֵינוּ: וְצִוִּיתִי אֶת בְּרַכְתִּי לָכֵם בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׂשִׁית וְעָשִׂיתִי אֶת תְּבוּאָה לְשֵׁלֶשׁ הַשָּׁנִים:

Why will this *brachah* only come when Klal Yisrael ask, “What will we eat?” Does Hashem not know what we need?



RAV MOSHE STERNBUCH:

The *brachah* uses up part of the reward for the mitzvah of *shemittah*. It would be wiser to tough out the year and leave the *schar* for the World of Truth. Only if someone asks for it in this world, out of worry for his physical comfort, will Hashem give it to him here.



NOAM ELIMELECH:

The fountains of *brachah* from Hashem are always open and flowing, filled with *brachah*, automatically. We don’t need to ask, and Hashem does not need to “order blessing.” But if we do ask, demonstrating doubt and insecurity, the flow stops! Only then does Hashem have to issue a special order to renew the flow.



SEFORNO:

There are two ways for a person to receive *brachah*: the usual amount of food can stretch further, bringing unusual satiation; or he can get more food. Had we not complained but relied on Hashem with *emunah*, we would have received the first type of *brachah*—which requires no headaches of extra harvesting, storage, and the like. But if we complain, we will only have the second form of *brachah*, with its drawbacks.

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

anyone else paid.

“What?!” the man spluttered. “Why so much! That’s ridiculous!”

“Sorry, sir, but it is right here in your file. That’s the price for you.”

“For me? Why am I being charged more?”

“Well, *chevra kaddisha* policy is that a man who commits financial fraud, failing to live as a contributing member of the community, pays extra for his burial plot. The extra funds will be used to support community charities, which he did not do.”

“Insane!” the man stormed. “I refuse to pay a *grush* more than anyone else!”

“In that case, feel free to bury yourself in your own backyard. These are the rules in Posen, and no other cemetery or community will take you.”

This man was no slouch. He was well-connected on all levels of government and was a powerful financier. He quickly complained to the local Prussian authorities that he was being targeted unfairly, price gouged, scalped, and he demanded justice.

Posen officials contacted the *chevra kaddisha* office for an explanation, or immediate reversal of the policy. Facing official legal penalties, the *chevra kaddisha* quickly cowered... and referred the officials to the rabbi of the city, Rabbi Akiva Eiger. The *rav* was summoned to the municipal building.

“Are you charging this man extra, unfairly?” the officials asked the rabbi.

“Certainly we are charging him more than most people,” Rabbi Akiva Eiger responded. “But there is nothing unfair about it.”

“How is it fair, exactly?”

“Well, our Torah teaches that it is forbidden to lend money and charge interest. In fact, one who charges interest is penalized by losing his right to be resurrected when Mashiach comes.” (Rabbi Akiva Eiger learned this from the words, “And your brother shall live with you,” immediately preceding the prohibition against *ribbis*. Also, the word *neshech* hints at *nachash*, a snake, who has no resurrection. See *Ba'al Haturim* in this week’s *parshah*.)

“So you see,” R. Akiva continued, “this man is asking for a very different deal than most members of our community. Most people just want to rent their burial plot—for a short while, we pray—until Mashiach comes, when they will awaken and leave the grave. This man, however, is not getting up! When he is buried, he’ll be keeping that land forever! That’s a purchase, not a rental. Of course, in that case, his price is much more than the rental fee others pay.”

The government officials were very impressed with the *rav*’s argument. They ordered the *ribbis*-lender to pay full price (or do *teshuvah* and desist from any more collections with interest)!

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 of *Parshas Bechukosai* is read. It is a classic rebuke from Yirmiyahu Hanavi. Much like the *tochachah* of *Parshas Bechukosai*, it compares those who do good to those who do evil; those who stick to Hashem to those who do not. These are blessed, those are cursed, as the *parshah* indicates.

Yirmiyahu sharply points out the sins of Klal Yisrael. He warns us not to fool ourselves into thinking we can get away with external piety, with a few donations to the Bais Hamikdash (another theme of *Bechukosai*, see *Avodah* of the Week). For Hashem plumbs the depths of hearts and knows the truth.

The haftorah also references the rights to ancestral land and inheritance spelled out in *Parshas Behar*; it warns that we will lose those if we do not mend our ways. And, like both *parshiyos*, the haftorah warns that punishment comes as a result of ignoring the rules of *shemittah*.

As always, the haftorah, like the *tochachah*, ends with a promise of redemption and healing.

RIPPED FROM THE HEADLINES

We are mere months from *shemittah*. The *brachah* of the sixth year is already blooming. Our prayer for redemption and hope intensifies as the Holy Land prepares to enter its own Holy Time.





UP FOR DISCUSSION

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

A STASH OF CASH

It can be assumed that by the time you found the money the person who lost it was aware that it was lost. People regularly check their pockets and the owner would have realized that it was lost, but since money does not have a *siman* – identifying mark – he despaired of recovering it (*C.M.* 262:3).

There are a number of reasons why the driver does not acquire the money but primarily it is because his car is considered a public place since he drives many people in his car and one's property does not acquire lost objects when the public has access to the area (*Shach* 260:18).



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אִם בְּחֻקְתֵי תֵלְכוּ (Vayikra 26:2)

...שְׁתֵּהוּ עֲמֵלִים בְּתוֹרָה... (Rashi)

אִם בְּחֻקְתֵי תֵלְכוּ = 1017 = עֲמֵלִים דְּבַרֵי תוֹרָה

(Ba'al Haturim)

Some versions of the *Ba'al Haturim* have the *girsas* עֲמֵלִים בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה, which does not match the *gematria* precisely, but more directly reflects Rashi and the *Toras Kohanim* he is quoting. But the *sefer Torah Lada'as* points out the *Gemara (Sanhedrin 99b)*, which explains that when one works hard in Torah study, the Torah goes to work for him, as well. This version of the *Ba'al Haturim* may be a reflection of that *Gemara*.



THIS DATE IN JEWISH HISTORY



The 26th of Iyar is the *yahrtzeit* of the Ramchal, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (5477–5507). Ramchal was born in 1707 in the Jewish ghetto of Padua, Republic of Venice, Italy. A brilliant *talmid chacham* and writer, he authored numerous *sefarim* on a wide range of topics, most of which are lost today.

By age 14, Ramchal knew the entire *Shas* and midrash by heart. He was also an expert in Kabbalah and many areas of science (according to some reports, his parents sent him to the University of Padua). But he is most famous for his brilliance as a writer, presenting the most complex topics in neatly organized form. His *sefarim* are leaders in *mussar*, *hashkafah*, Kabbalah, analysis of Talmudic logic, and more. He also wrote a lot of *piyutim* and *tefillas*, in a beautiful poetic style. The Vilna Gaon said that had Ramchal been alive, he would have walked from Vilna to learn from him, and that *Mesillas Yesharim* contains not one extra word.

Ramchal received a *maggid*—a *malach* who learned with him—at the age of 20. Although other *talmidei chachamim* had a *maggid*, none received one at such a young age. The Jewish world was still reeling over the scandal of Shabsai Tzvi, a false *mashiach* who duped many people before he converted to Islam, and some leading *rabbanim* were suspicious of Ramchal as well. A lot of his *sefarim*, particularly ones on Kabbalah, were burned, and he was forced to leave Italy. He moved to Amsterdam, where he lived in secret, working as a diamond cutter and writing *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Da'as Tevunos*, and *Derech Hashem*.

Longing to live in Eretz Yisrael, Ramchal moved to Acco in 5503. He and his entire family died in an epidemic just four years later, when he was just 40 years old. His shul was destroyed by the city's Bedouin ruler, Zahir al-Umar, in 1758, who built a mosque on top of it. In its place, the Jews of Acco received a small building north of the mosque, which still functions as a synagogue and bears Ramchal's name.

Ramchal is buried near R. Akiva, on the hill overlooking Teveria. Many say he was a *gilgul* of R. Akiva and repaired the first 40 years of his life.

HALACHAH

Reading the Tochachah

Which *parshiyos* are referred to as *tochachah*?

The curses said by Hashem in *Parshas Bechukosai*, and the much longer ones said by Moshe in *Parshas Ki Savo*, are both considered *tochachah*. Their *halachos* differ somewhat because *Bechukosai* is said in singular form, while *Ki Savo* is in plural.

How should we view the curses?

The *klalos* should be seen as a rebuke meant to help us set our ways straight. We should not try to avoid the reading or do it improperly. The *pasuk* (*Mishlei* 3:11), "חֹסֵר ה' בְּנֵי אֵל תִּמְאָס וְאֵל תִּקְיָץ, בְּתוֹכָהֶן," is applied to it, and in some *kehillos* is recited by the *oleh* before the *brachah*. The *poskim* speak very harshly about a *kehillah* that doesn't read the *tochachah*, or zooms through it without hearing the words properly, comparing them to someone who thinks he will be safe walking through a minefield if he keeps his eyes closed the whole time.

Nevertheless, we need to be careful not to apply the curses to any particular person or individual.

Who gets the *aliyah* of the *tochachah*?

In most shuls, the *ba'al koreh* takes the *aliyah* himself so that he is not reading the curses to anyone in particular. If he is a *kohen* or *levi*, he can still get it—for *Parshas Bechukosai*, the later *aliyos* can be divided among the *pesukim* after the *tochachah*. For *Behar-Bechukosai* or *Ki Savo*, all the *aliyos* can be divided before the *tochachah*, and the *ba'al koreh* takes it himself as *acharon*.

In some *kehillos*, the *rav*—who takes other special *aliyos*, such as the *Aseres Hadibros* and the *Shirah*—takes the *tochachah* as well. Other *kehillos* actually pay someone to take the *aliyah*. The *Mishnah Berurah* promises *brachah* to someone who steps up to take the *aliyah* because he is *שׂוֹמֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יֵדַע דְּבַר רַע*. The *gabbai* can also take it.

Who should *not* take the *aliyah*?

Someone in a fight with the *ba'al koreh* should not be given the *aliyah*. If he is, some *poskim* even allow him to refuse it, because there is concern that the *ba'al koreh* may have him in mind when reading the curses. Of course, the *ba'al koreh* should not do that.

How is the *oleh* called up?

The *oleh* for the *tochachah* is not called up at all. This is because we are afraid he will refuse to go, and will bring dishonor to the Torah and bring upon himself the curse that applies to someone who refuses to go to an *aliyah* to which he is called. If there is a designated person, he can be called by name, but the custom is not to do so.

Can the curses be divided among several people?

The curses of *Bechukosai*, which are read in *lashon yachid*, may not be divided among multiple people. *Ki Savo* may be, but the custom is not to do so.

We cannot say a *brachah* on curses, therefore the *tochachah* has to be read together with other *pesukim*. The same *aliyah* should have at least three *pesukim* before and three after, because we do not stop or start within three *pesukim* of the end of a *parshah*.

How should the curses be read?

The curses should be read in a lower, quicker voice than usual, but loud enough and clearly enough to be heard by everyone.

THE LAST WORD

A one-liner worth remembering

"OTHERWISE, YOU'LL BE SHVANTZ SHEB'SHVANTZ (TAIL OF THE TAIL)!"

—The Rebbe of Kotzk, explaining to someone that the basic obligations of a Jew are more important than worrying about lofty, Kabbalistic concepts such as the combinations of *sefiros* many recite each night of *sefiros ha'omer*.



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