



THE PERSON

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB  
OU Executive Vice President, Emeritus

IN THE PARSHA

## And the Winner Is...

It was the first time that I announced a contest from the pulpit. It felt like a risky thing to do, and probably was. But it worked, and I tried it several times over the ensuing years.

It was on the occasion of this week's Torah portion, *Parshat Ki Tetzei*, but it was many, many years ago. What prompted me to launch the contest with confidence was a discussion I had one Friday morning with a group of teenagers. They were frustrated by the fact that they could find little relevance in many of the biblical passages that we were studying. So many of these passages seemed to be speaking of events and circumstances that were unrelated to those prevalent in the lives of these teens.

May the Torah learned from this issue of Torah Tidbits be in loving memory of my beloved mother

**רייזל בת שלמה צבי ע"ה**

**Raizel Byer nee Batshaw a"h**

beloved wife, mother, grandmother  
and great-grandmother

on her 36th *yahrzeit*

*Shulamit Tyberg-Isaacs*

Instead of offering my own ideas about this issue, I told them that I would challenge the entire congregation to find relevance in some of the passages of that week's *parsha*, which happened to have been *Ki Tetzei*. They felt excited to be in on what they viewed as a conspiracy, the planning of a sermon in which the rabbi would turn the table on the members of the congregation and require a response from them.

I stood up that Saturday morning and began by quoting the following verse: "If you see your fellow's donkey or ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it; you must help him raise it." (*Deuteronomy 22:4*) Rashi, following the explanation of the Talmud, understands this to mean that if the donkey's pack falls off his back you must help your friend replace it there. This is the *mitzvah* known as *te'inah*, or uploading.

I challenged the audience with the following question: "Of what possible relevance is placing a fallen burden back on a donkey to us in our daily lives? When is the last time you met a donkey or an ox on the road, with or without a sack on the ground beside it?"

I then asked the audience to take out their *Chumashim*, their Bibles, and turned back to a passage we had studied together during the previous winter in the Torah portion of *Mishpatim*. There we read, "When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its

burden and would otherwise refrain from helping him, you must nevertheless help him.” (Exodus 23:5)

Rashi, again following the Talmud, sees this as the *mitzvah* of *perikah*, of helping to unload the donkey of its burden, and helping even one’s enemy in the process. “Now I understand,” I argued to the audience, “that the lesson of helping one’s enemy may be a relevant, if unpopular, one. But unloading a donkey? When was the last time anyone here did that?”

Then I announced the contest. “I am not going to provide my own suggestions to answer these questions,” I said. “Rather, we are going to have a contest in which each of you can write your own answers to these questions.”

I had done some preliminary work before Shabbat and enlisted two well-respected members of the synagogue to serve along with me on a panel of judges to evaluate the submissions and to decide upon the top three responses.

I must confess to having been delighted by the number and quality of the answers that were handed in. It was by no means a simple task to decide upon the three most creative ideas.

As the second runner up; that is, the third of the top three, my two judicial cohorts and I chose the answer submitted by our *shul’s* resident *yeshiva bachur*, a young student who found the answers to most of his questions in the Talmud. He reminded us of the passage in Tractate *Bava Metzia* which imagined a situation in which a person



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would have to choose between the *mitzvot* of uploading and unloading, between *te'inah* and *perikah*.

The Talmud describes the dilemma of the person who encounters not one, but two, donkeys. One donkey has its fallen cargo on the ground next to it; the other is bent under its burden. You have time for only one donkey. Which one do you attend to?

The Talmud answers that your priority is to unload the overburdened donkey. The Jewish value of *tza'ar ba'alei chayim*, sensitivity to the suffering of animals, trumps the *mitzvah* of *te'inah*. "Surely teaching about the need to avoid cruelty to animals is a relevant lesson," argued the budding Talmudic scholar.

The runner up, number two in the contest, was our local psychologist. "Every day," he asserted, "I help to unload peoples' burdens. I try to listen to them and to somehow

lighten the weight that they feel. That's *perikah*. And then there are those whom one must encourage to 'upload' the packs on their backs and to 'keep on truckin,' to get back on the road, and to get on with their lives. That's *te'inah*."

Our panel of judges was in for a surprise when it came to the contestant who won the grand prize. Of all the many members of the synagogue, it was the aging cantor who was clearly the winner. We all knew that his voice was far from what it once was and that he had trouble reaching the high notes as well as the lowest notes on the musical scale. But we kept him on, and indeed cherished him, for his genuine piety and sincere humanity.

"Whenever I stand in front of the congregation," he said, "and anticipate the difficulty I am about to have in reaching the high notes, I appreciate those of you who sing and chant along with me and help me achieve those high notes. You uplift me. When you do that, you fulfill the *mitzvah* of *te'inah*. And as I falter in trying to descend the musical ladder to those lower notes, and you, the congregation, come to my aid with your voices, you help lower my burden, and you perform the *mitzvah* of *perikah*."

We are told that there are seventy facets to the Torah. We had about seventy contributions to our contest that Shabbat. I have shared only the top three with you, dear reader, and challenge you to come up with others on your own. ■

On the first yahretzeit of our beloved husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather

**Rabbi Marvin B. Pachino z"l**

הרב משה בער בן אברהם אבא ז"ל

י"אלול

A short Zoom Shiur will be presented by Akiva Rappaport on Sunday, August 22nd at 8:30pm (1:30pm EST)

Link: <https://bit.ly/3AFx1HF>

Meeting ID: 822 7976 4361

Passcode: 431147

*Pachino, Alper, Kurtz and Rappaport Families*

Shabbat afternoon Parsha shiur with Rabbi Chanoch Yeres at 5:00pm in the back garden of the OU Israel Center