

# NCYI Youth Groups Parshat Shoftim

[http://www.headcoverings-by-devorah.com/HebEngTaNaKh\\_TorahSummary.htm](http://www.headcoverings-by-devorah.com/HebEngTaNaKh_TorahSummary.htm)

## Parsha Outline

- Establishing judges and police
- Penalty for idolatry
- Supreme court
- Kings
- Levitical Kohanim
- Divination
- Cities of refuge
- Witnesses
- Going to war
- Unsolved murders

## Parsha Summaries

[http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/416064/jewish/Shoftim-Roundup.htm](http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/416064/jewish/Shoftim-Roundup.htm)

### Shoftim Roundup

#### Justice

The name of this week's Parshah, Shoftim, means judges, and the Parshah begins with Moses commanding the People of Israel to appoint judges to decide on the law. This is a part of making sure that we live in a just society--where laws are fair and applied properly. If someone is accused of committing a crime, it must be investigated properly, and no one can be judged guilty unless there are at least two witnesses who actually saw him do the crime. And a judge is never allowed to take bribes, because even if he thinks that he'll just take the money and then decide the case fairly, the Torah says that this is impossible, and people's minds are always influenced by money.

#### Laws for Kings

When the Jews come to the land of Israel and appoint a king, there are certain rules he will have to keep. He can't have too many horses or too many wives. He must also have two Torah scrolls. One is to carry around with him, to remind him that even though he is king, he must be humble, and follow the Torah, and remember that G-d is above him.

## **Cities of Refuge**

If somebody accidentally kills somebody else, for example, if two people are chopping wood together, and the top of one person's axe flies off the handle and kills the other. then the brother of the one who is killed may be so angry that he wants to go after the killer, even though it was an accident. So, the Torah commands the Jews to set up special cities in Israel called "Cities of Refuge" where the person who killed accidentally can run and be safe from the victim's family. Once a person is in the city of refuge, the family of the person he killed can not hurt him. But he has to stay there for a long time, until the Kohen Gadol (high priest) passes away.

## **Rules of War**

Before the Jews go to war against their enemies, a Kohen will come and tell them that there is no reason to fear, for G-d is with them and will fight for them. So everybody should go bravely to war. Everybody except the following: Someone who just build a house, planted a vineyard, or gotten married. Another person exempted from battle is someone who is afraid. Because if he is afraid, that shows that he does not trust in G-d, or that he knows that he sinned and is not worthy of G-d's protection, and in that case, he should not go to war with the rest of the Jews.

When the People of Israel come to fight with an enemy, they should first offer peace.

When they take over a country, they are not allowed to chop down or destroy and trees that give fruit.

## **The Laws of "Eglah Arufah."**

If a person is found dead outside a city, the city that is closest has to take responsibility for the death and perform a special procedure with a calf. This teaches us that it is our responsibility to make sure that whenever somebody leaves our city, they have enough food and protection for the way so that they arrive home safe and sound.

[http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/546634/jewish/Aliya-Summary.htm](http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/546634/jewish/Aliya-Summary.htm)

## **Shoftim Aliya Summary**

**General Overview:** This week's reading, *Shoftim*, addresses fundamental issues pertaining to the leadership of the Jewish people. It begins with a discussion regarding judges, and later discusses the concept of the kings, prophets, and the *kohanim* (priests).

Many commandments are introduced in this weeks reading, including: appointing judges, the obligation to follow Rabbinic Law and the words of the prophets, the obligations of a king, the punishment for perjury, laws of war, and the procedure for dealing with unsolved murders.

---

**First Aliyah:** We are commanded to appoint judges in every city of Israel. These judges are instructed to adjudicate fairly. Capital punishment is prescribed for idolatry, and various idolatrous practices are banned. The sacrifices we offer to G-d must be blemishless. We must follow the rulings of the *Sanhedrin*, the Rabbinic Supreme Court, and the Oral Law. Refusal to accept the *Sanhedrin's* authority is a capital offense.

---

**Second Aliyah:** Moses instructs the Israelites to coronate a king after they enter Israel. A Jewish king may not amass an excessive amount of horses, wives, or personal wealth. The king writes for himself two Torah scrolls. One of them remains with him at all times -- a constant reminder to remain humble and follow G-d's Law.

---

**Third Aliyah:** The *Kohanim* were chosen by G-d to be His holy servants. They do not receive an inheritance (portion) in the Land of Israel, because "G-d is their inheritance." Instead, the *Kohanim* are the beneficiaries of various priestly gifts; selections of meat from certain sacrifices, as well as tithes from crops and animal shearings.

---

**Fourth Aliyah:** Although the Priestly families were divided into many shifts, each serving in the Temple in their designated turn, a *Kohen* always retains the right to come to the Temple and personally offer his personal sacrifices. This section then contains prohibitions against divination, fortunetelling and similar occult practices. Instead of probing into the future we are commanded to put our faith and trust in G-d.

---

**Fifth Aliyah:** We also have no need for these abovementioned abominable practices because we are blessed with prophets who transmit G-d's messages to His people. We are commanded to obey these prophets. This section prescribes the punishments for non-

compliance with prophets' words, as well as for an individual who falsely claims to speak in G-d's name. This aliyah then reiterates the command to establish cities of refuge for the inadvertent murderer. Moses commands the Jews to designate six such cities, and when G-d expands the borders of the land (with the coming of Moshiach) to add another three cities of refuge.

---

**Sixth Aliyah:** A minimum of two witnesses are required to secure a conviction in a capital or corporeal punishment case. Individuals who testify falsely are liable to receive the punishment which they sought to have imposed upon their innocent victim. The procedure for battle is outlined in this section. When approaching the battlefield, a *Kohen* addresses the troops, admonishing them not to fear the enemy, and listing the various individuals who are exempt from military duty, such as one who has recently betrothed a woman or built a new home, or a fainthearted and fearful person.

---

**Seventh Aliyah:** Before waging battle against an enemy in battle, we are commanded to make a peaceful overture. Only if the enemy does not accept the offer does battle ensue. In the battles against the Canaanite nations, if the enemy does not agree to the peace offer, the Israelites are commanded to completely annihilate them. We are forbidden to cut down fruit-bearing trees while laying siege on a city. The reading closes with the procedure to be followed in the event of an unsolved murder.

<http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/3632>

Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden. Trees are not to be planted near Hashem's altar, as was the way of idolaters. Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed. The Great Sanhedrin is to make binding decisions on new situations according to Torah criteria to prevent the fragmentation of the Torah. A very learned scholar who refuses to accept the Halachic decisions of the Sanhedrin incurs the death penalty. A Jewish king may only have possessions and symbols of power commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two *sifrei Torah*, one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty. Neither the *kohanim* nor the *levi'im* are to inherit land in the Land of Israel, rather they are to be supported by the community by a system of tithes. All divination is prohibited. Hashem promises the Jewish People that He will send them prophets to guide them, and Moshe explains how a genuine prophet may be distinguished from a false one. Cities of refuge are to be provided an accidental killer to escape the blood-avenger from the deceased's family. However, someone who kills with malice is to

be handed over to the blood-avenger. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to move boundary markers to increase their property. Two witnesses who conspire to "frame" a third party are to be punished with the very same punishment that they conspired to bring upon the innocent party. A *kohen* is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill trust in Hashem. Among those disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house but not lived in it yet, or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted. An enemy must be given the chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed. Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege. If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

---

## Parsha Songs

[The lyrics are supplied here. For the tunes, please click on the link]

[http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/573782/jewish/Parshah-Song.htm](http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/573782/jewish/Parshah-Song.htm)

Lyrics:

MISSING

## Parsha Questions & Answers

Selected from the following websites:

[http://www.chinuch.org/item\\_details.php?mid=7078](http://www.chinuch.org/item_details.php?mid=7078)

[http://www.chinuch.org/item\\_details.php?mid=4157](http://www.chinuch.org/item_details.php?mid=4157)

[http://www.chinuch.org/item\\_details.php?mid=390](http://www.chinuch.org/item_details.php?mid=390)

[http://www.chinuch.org/item\\_details.php?mid=1684](http://www.chinuch.org/item_details.php?mid=1684)

<http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/1195>

The following are a selection of questions obtained from the above mentioned websites.

K-2

Questions

1. How must all judges judge?
2. What does bribery do to a person?
3. How should we view the king?
4. How can we know if someone is a false prophet?
5. What must one do if he killed someone accidentally?
6. What is needed in order to convict someone of a crime?
7. What are Edim Zomemim?

8. What is their special punishment?
9. What is the ceremony of Eglah Erufah?
10. When is this done and from where do we take this calf?

## Answers

1. Honestly, without taking any types of bribes.
2. Blinds him
3. He should be a role model for us, and help us to better appreciate the “King of all Kings”-HaShem.
4.
  - a. If he says something will happen and it does not
  - b. If he tells us not to follow one of the Mitzvoth of the Torah
5. Run to one of the Arei Miklat (cities of refuge)
6. Two witnesses
7. Witnesses who try to frame someone for a crime. (They claim that a person did a certain crime in a certain place at a certain time. However, they could not possibly know if the crime happened since they were somewhere else at that time).
8. They receive whatever punishment they intended for the other person.
9. A calf is taken to an unplowed area and its neck is broken
10.
  - a. When a dead body is found and nobody knows who killed that person
  - b. From the city which is closest to the place that the body was found

## 3-4

## Questions

1. How must all judges judge?
2. What is a zaken mamrei?
3. What is the punishment and why?
4. What does bribery do to a person?
5. What are some of the special mitzvot of a king?
6. How should we view the king?
7. How can we know if someone is a false prophet?
8. What are some practices of other nations that HaShem finds revolting?
9. What must one do if he killed someone accidentally?
10. What is needed in order to convict someone of a crime?
11. What are Edim Zomemim?
12. What is their special punishment?
13. What is the ceremony of Eglah Erufah?
14. When is this done?
15. From where do we take this calf?

## Answers

1. Honestly, without taking any types of bribes.
2. A Torah scholar who goes against the Torah.
3. He receives the death penalty because he was a leading Rabbi and people followed his incorrect decisions.
4. Blinds him
5. He may NOT have too many wives, too many horses, too much wealth; and he must write a Sefer Torah for himself.
6. He should be a role model for us, and help us to better appreciate the “King of all Kings”-HaShem.
7.
  - a. If he says something will happen and it does not
  - b. If he tells us not to follow one of the Mitzvoth of the Torah
8. Other nations sacrifice children, practice witchcraft and fortune telling, and communicate with the dead
9. Run to one of the Arei Miklat (cities of refuge)
10. Two witnesses
11. Witnesses who try to frame someone for a crime. (They claim that a person did a certain crime in a certain place at a certain time. However, they could not possibly know if the crime happened since they were somewhere else at that time).
12. They receive whatever punishment they intended for the other person.
13. A calf is taken to an unplowed area and its neck is broken
14. When a dead body is found and nobody knows who killed that person
15. From the city which is closest to the place that the body was found

## 5-6

### Questions

1. How many judges were in each town?
2. How must all judges judge?
3. What is a zaken mamrei?
4. What is the punishment and why?
5. What does bribery do to a person?
6. What is a mum and are we allowed to use an animal that has a mum for a korban?
7. Which three mitzvot did Bnei Yisrael have to perform when they entered Eretz Yisrael?
8. What are some of the special mitzvot of a king?
9. How should we view the king?
10. How can we know if someone is a false prophet?
11. What are some practices of other nations that HaShem finds revolting?
12. What must one do if he killed someone accidentally?
13. How many Arei Miklat are there?
14. What is needed in order to convict someone of a crime?
15. What are Edim Zomemim?

16. What is their special punishment?
17. What sort of people could be free from going to war?
18. What is the ceremony of Eglah Erufah?
19. When is this done?
20. From where do we take this calf?

## Answers

1. The smaller cities had courts of three judges and the larger cities had courts of twenty three judges. In Yerushalayim was the great Sanhedrin of seventy one judges.
2. Honestly, without taking any types of brides.
3. A Torah scholar who goes against the Torah.
4. He receives the death penalty because he was a leading Rabbi and people followed his incorrect decisions.
5. Blinds him
6.
  - a. A blemish
  - b. NO
7.
  - a. Appoint a king
  - b. Destroy amalek
  - c. Build the Beit Hamikdash
8. He may NOT have too many wives, too many horses, too much wealth; and he must write a Sefer Torah for himself.
9. He should be a role model for us, and help us to better appreciate the “King of all Kings”-HaShem.
10.
  - a. If he says something will happen and it does not
  - b. If he tells us not to follow one of the Mitzvoth of the Torah
11. Other nations sacrifice children, practice witchcraft and fortune telling, and communicate with the dead
12. Run to one of the Arei Miklat (cities of refuge)
13. Six – three in Eretz Yisrael and three in Ever Hayarden
14. Two witnesses
15. Witnesses who try to frame someone for a crime. (They claim that a person did a certain crime in a certain place at a certain time. However, they could not possibly know if the crime happened since they were somewhere else at that time).
16. They receive whatever punishment they intended for the other person.
17.
  - a. Someone who built a new house and did not yet live in it
  - b. Someone who planted a vineyard and did not have a chance to take fourth year fruits to Yerushalayim
  - c. Someone who was engaged but not yet married
  - d. Someone who was weak-hearted and afraid.
18. A calf is taken to an unplowed area and its neck is broken

19. When a dead body is found and nobody knows who killed that person
20. From the city which is closest to the place that the body was found

## Parsha Stories

[http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/725199/jewish/Bribery.htm](http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/725199/jewish/Bribery.htm)

### Bribery?

By [Mendy Loewenthal](#)

Debby swung open the gate to her front garden and ran up the front path. "Hi everybody, I'm home!" Today had been the first day of her summer day camp.

Debby excitedly told her family at the supper table all about the stunning arts and crafts they had begun, the brilliant game of netball they had played, and last but not least she told them about the play. It was going to be on the last day of camp, and all the parents would be invited to come and watch.

The play was named 'The Golden Shoes' and was set in the times of King Solomon. More than that she could not tell her family, they would have to come and see the play for themselves. Debby loved acting and she thought, hoped, *hoped*, that perhaps she would be chosen to act the main role. Debby came into the kitchen later that evening and sat on a chair watching her older sister Rina baking. She was making Swiss rolls filled with jam.

They looked really delicious, and Debby was hoping she would be allowed to taste some. She suddenly had an idea. "Rina, those Swiss rolls look really, really good". "Well don't touch any please, you can taste them later when they're finished and cooled down," her sister quickly responded. "Rina, please, would I be able to take one of them to my camp counselor tomorrow. Or even half of one." This was Debby's wonderful idea. Perhaps if she would give her counselor a cake, Debby explained to her older sister, maybe she would then be chosen for the leading role in the play...

Rina looked puzzled at this. "I don't know, it doesn't sound quite right."

"What do you think Rafi?" she turned to their brother who had just come into the kitchen. Rafi wrinkled his nose.

"I think that's an awful idea Debby. The counselor will choose whoever she thinks is capable. If that is you, then very good. If not, that's just life. Actually, it even speaks

about something similar in the Torah. It speaks about judges, and people in authority. It gives a whole list of qualities these people must have and the type of lifestyle they must lead.

One thing it says is that they must not accept bribes. That's basically what you would be trying to do, bribe the counselor." He shrugged. "Anyway, I want to eat the cakes. They look delicious!" Rina and Debby both laughed.

[http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/413401/jewish/Shoftim-Parshah-Lesson.htm](http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/413401/jewish/Shoftim-Parshah-Lesson.htm)

## Shoftim Parshah Lesson

By [Malka Touger](#)

It was the last week of summer vacation. Camp was over, and the children had been home all week. They were delighted when their father came home and said, "Come on kids, I'll take you out to the Botanical Gardens and we'll all give Mom a well-deserved rest."

Off they went to the park, equipped with their balls and snacks.

"Let's try to find a nice shaded area to play," their father suggested.

The children raced about happily, stopping to watch the ducks splash noisily in the pond. Soon they found a perfect spot to play. As Sam helped take the baby out of the stroller, he pointed to a uniformed man standing nearby. "Daddy, why are there so many guards and policemen in the park? There were at least five others at the entrances we passed. What would anyone want to steal from a park?"

"The city officials built this park so that people could come and enjoy the outdoors," dad said. "There are many entrances to the park, and these guards watch who and what comes through. They help keep the park safe and orderly. Actually, Sam, we'll be reading about guards and policemen in synagogue on Shabbat."

Sam looked at his father in surprise, "Guards and policemen in the Torah?"

"Yes," his father replied. "The Torah describes the judges and officers who were to watch our city gates in order to prevent harmful people or things from entering."

Sam's father bent down and looked directly into his eyes. "Do you know, Sam, that you are just like a miniature city yourself? Your eyes and ears are the 'gates' to your 'city,' and they allow pictures, sounds, and feelings to come in. But not everything is good for your city. So G-d told us to place judges and officers at our gates.

"Don't let everything go through, Sam. Judge and decide what is good for your 'eye gates', and if what you hear is proper 'ear gates' .

"Be on guard. If you catch something that should not enter through your gates, enforce the law; prevent it from coming in."

<http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/Parshat-Shoftim.pdf?docid=3634&ie=1&showobject=1>

## LESSONS FROM THE PARSHA

### UPHOLD THE PEACE

I'm not your friend! I don't want to speak to you anymore!" *Shloimie runs in the house and closes the door. His mother sees that he is very upset.* "What happened Shloimie dear?" "I had a disagreement with my ex-friend Fayvel. We had different opinions about something the teacher said. Each one of us stuck to his point of view. Things escalated, and before long, we were both angry. He insulted me. At that point, I decided to end our friendship. That's it. Our friendship is finished." "But Shloimie dear, what about making shalom?" "Why should I bother, Imma? It is too difficult. I have to go back to him, explain myself, listen to his point of view, apologize, and then look to compromise or give in. It is hard work to try to understand him and make him understand me. I don't think that it is worth it." "Shloimie, may I share something with you from this week's parasha which may change your point of view?" "Yes, Imma." "Rabbeinu Bechaye begins his commentary on Parashas Shoftim by quoting Shlomo HaMelech . 'Its (the Torah's) ways are pleasant, and all its paths are peace' (Mishlei 3:17). The foundation of the Torah – its main message – is shalom. The world was created in shalom – peaceful harmony." "How, Imma?"

*Shomayim* (the heavens) were created first. They are called '*shomayim*' because they are a combination of '*aish*' (fire) and '*mayim*' (water). Fire and water are two complete opposites! It is impossible for them to exist together. Yet, Hashem made peace between them in order to create *shomayim*. That is the meaning of the verse 'He makes peace in the upper worlds' (Iyov 25:2)." "That is fascinating, Imma." "Rabbeinu Bechaye elaborates by giving many examples of shalom in Hashem's world. He concludes by saying that the world still rests upon shalom, as the Mishna (Pirkei Avos 1:18) relates, 'The world continues to stand because of three things – *din* (judgment), *emmes* (truth),

and *shalom*, as the verse states, “Truth and justice, peace shall rule in your gates” (Zechariah 8:16).” “How does judgment relate to peace, Imma?” “*Shoftim* (judges) who teach the Torah, and *poskin* (make legal rulings) with the clarity of pure Torah wisdom, uphold peace in the world. How? The Torah’s ways are shalom. Therefore, if everyone knows the Torah, follows it, and allows its laws to settle their differences, the world will be at peace. It must be so; because that is the way that Hashem created the world, and upholds its existence. Shloimie, if you make shalom with Fayvel, you uphold the world. If you do not, heaven forbid, you undermine the world’s existence.” “Wow. I never realized how important shalom is, Imma.” “Rabbeinu Bechaye adds that *shoftim* (judges) and *shotrim* (enforcement officers) were appointed to carry out the Torah. The *shoftim* were wise men who taught Torah and made *halachic* decisions. People could ask them any question and receive the correct answer. That is the first step to shalom, knowing what to do. The second step is insuring that the teachings and rulings of the *shoftim* were carried out. That was the job of the *shotrim*. The two together upheld the peace in Klal Yisrael, and kept the world going.” “Thank you Imma. I am going straight to my friend Fayvel, and making shalom with him.” “May Hashem give you great success!”

*Kinderlach . . .*

*How do we make shalom? By living according to the emmes of Torah. We are very fortunate to have wise men – great teachers of Torah – who will teach us the laws bein odom li’Makom (between man and Hashem) and bein odom li’chaveyro (between man and his friend). We must learn from them and follow their teachings. When questions arise, we must clarify them. When we encounter differences of opinion with our fellow men, we must go to these wise men who will resolve the conflict according to the emmes of Torah law. Then we must carry out what they say. Do not wait for the shotrim to force you to do the right thing. Do it on your own! Uphold the Torah! Make shalom! Uphold the world!*

## GUARD THE GATES

The security situation was serious. Guards were everywhere. In the schools and stores, at the bus stops, banks, and simcha halls. They even set up roadblocks and stopped cars. They were checking everyone and everything that wanted to enter. Metal detectors, frisking, checking ID cards - no security measure was spared.

You might think that the population was up in arms over this massive inconvenience. Not true. No one seemed to mind. They knew how serious the danger was. They knew that the destructive forces had to be stopped. At all costs.

“Judges and guards shall you appoint in all your gates” (Devarim 16:18). The Arizal is puzzled. Why does the verse write the word “you” in the singular tense, and not the plural? These judges and guards were, after all, charged with serving all of Klal Yisrael, and not any one individual. He answers this question with a beautiful drasha from Rav Chaim Vital. Each and every Jew has several “gates” that need to be guarded. The gates of vision: the eyes. The gates of sound: the ears. The gate of speech: the mouth. The

gate of fragrance: the nose. The gates of touch: the hands and feet. A person must place judges and guards at each of these gates. He has to check and evaluate each sensation that wants to enter his body and soul. The dangerous forces must be kept out. He guards his eyes from seeing impurity. His ears need protection from hearing loshon hora, *apikorsus* (heresy), destructive music, and mockery. His mouth cannot be allowed to speak *rechilus*, and derogatory words. His nose and hands should not smell or touch anything that will contaminate his pure thoughts. His feet should not take him to the wrong places, where the wrong kinds of people congregate. In short, a person must be his own judge and security guard on his own gates. The judge is charged with thoroughly checking everything that wants to enter, and the guard must shut the door on the bad influences. We don't mind the inconvenience. We know how serious the situation is.

*Kinderlach . . .*

*Our senses are the gates to our souls. Guard them! You would not think of swallowing a piece of dirt or garbage. It would pollute your mouth, stomach, and your whole body. Spiritual dirt contaminates your soul. There are many destructive forces out there. The big screen, the little screen, the wrong reading material, and the bad company, to name a few. They can ruin you if you let them. Be a good judge and watchman. Guard the gates.*

<http://www.aish.com/torahportion/pArchive.asp?eventType=48&eventName=Shoftim>

There are other stories available as well at the above website.

[http://www.aish.com/torahportion/family/Dont\\_Be\\_Superstitious.asp](http://www.aish.com/torahportion/family/Dont_Be_Superstitious.asp)

**Shoftim** (Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9)

**Don't Be Superstitious**

## From this week's Torah Portion

There's no reason to be superstitious. In this week's Torah portion (18, 9-11) we learn that the Torah way is to live our lives with trust in God and not worry about sorcery or silly superstitions.

---

## Story

*In our story, a kid discovers the true source of his good 'luck.'*

**CHARM SCHOOL**

The race was about to begin. Danny stood at the starting line and patted the pocket of his track shorts to make sure it was still there. Yup - there it was -- the lucky four-leaf clover he had found and that had brought him so much success in racing this track season.

"Go!" the track judge shouted, starting the race. Danny sprinted hard, pushing to get ahead of his opponents. A bit more than a minute later, he'd been first across the finish line. Victory! All thanks to his magic lucky charm.

"Nice race today, Danny!" his sister, Judy, smiled, as the two of them jumped into the back of their family car on the way home from the track meet. "Winning today means you get to race in the championship meet next week, right?"

"Sure does!" Danny beamed. "And I'm going to win, too - thanks to this." He patted his pocket.

"Thanks to your pocket?" Judy asked, confused.

"No, silly - what's inside." He pulled out the carefully laminated four-leaf clover that had accompanied him on every race. "It's my magic lucky charm."

Judy rolled her eyes. "Oh, come on, Danny. Don't tell me you actually believe in that superstitious mumbo-jumbo? You didn't win that race today - or any day - because of some little green flower. You won because you trained hard and God gave you a strong, healthy body that can run fast."

"Look, you don't have to believe me," he sniffed, stuffing the charm back into his pocket. "But I *know* I won because of my magic lucky charm - and it's my charm that's going to bring me the 'gold' in the championship race."

\* \* \*

The day before the big race Judy was doing her homework while Danny was doing a training workout with weights in their basement. Suddenly, Judy heard a pain-filled cry.

"UGHH! OH NO! UGHH!!!"

Certain that Danny had injured himself terribly, she flew down the basement steps to find him on his knees, his face flushed a deep red.

"Danny! Are you okay?!! Should I call Mom? Should I call an ambulance?"

"No, no ... I'm fine," the boy waved her off. "I didn't get hurt or anything. Just while I was working out, I ... I checked my pocket to make sure my magic lucky

charm was there and it's ... it's GONE! Now I'm crawling all around to see if it fell on the floor around here. I'm really desperate to find it!"

Judy's expression went from fear and concern to incredulity. "Danny, give me a break! It's just a silly, superstitious nothing and it has *nothing* to do with what you're going to do in the race."

"You don't understand! The championship race is tomorrow and if I don't find it, I'm sunk!"

The next day at the track meet, Danny glumly waited for his turn to race - or that is, waited to get it over with, because now without his magic lucky charm, he felt like he had no chance to win.

"Hey Danny!" He turned to the area in the crowd where his name was being called, and saw his sister, Judy waving him to come to her. Figuring he had a couple of minutes before his race and nothing to lose, he shuffled over.

"Danny I want you to remember, it's all up to you and God's help whether you're going to win today or not."

"Yeah, you told me that before, but my magic..."

"However," his sister cut him off in mid-sentence, "I imagine you'd want to put this in your pocket." She took a small laminated square out of her pouch. *His charm! She'd found it!!!*

"You're the greatest, Judy!" the boy beamed, as he quickly stuffed the precious charm in his pocket and jogged back to the starting line just in time for his race.

"Get set... Go!" the starter shouted. Danny flew like the wind, easily beating his opponents, logging the fastest time of his life.

"Great race, Danny. You did it!!" Judy shouted from the grandstand as her now champion-racer brother walked her way.

"Yeah, once I got my charm I became a new person. I'll bet from now on you'll believe me about it."

Judy gave him a strange smile.

"And I'll bet that from now on *you'll* believe *me* - once you look closely at your supposed charm."

"Huh?" Perplexed, Danny fished it out of his pocket, gazed at it ... and blanched. It wasn't his four-leaf clover magic lucky charm at all, it was just a small green piece of paper with the words 'In God we trust' written on it! He really didn't need the clover - or any silly magic charm at all. All he needed was to give it his all and trust God to help him out.

Danny looked at Judy, and then the two of them burst out laughing. It seemed that losing his 'lucky' charm, just might have been the *luckiest* thing that ever happened to him in his life.

---

## Discussion Questions

### Ages 3-5

Q. How did Danny feel at first about winning his race?

A. He felt like he needed a 'lucky charm' to win.

Q. How did he feel in the end?

A. He realized that it was just a silly superstition and he didn't need it.

### Ages 6-9

Q. What life-lesson did Danny learn from what happened?

A. He'd convinced himself that he needed some sort of 'magic charm' to be successful in life, but once he won the race without a charm he understood that he didn't need anything other than himself and God's help.

Q. What, if anything, is wrong with superstition and sorcery?

A. These types of things trap and confuse a person by making him think that he can somehow 'cheat' his way through life without being responsible for his own choices. They also give him the false impression that he can rely on something other than God.

### Ages 10 and Up

Q. Can magic charms and sorcery ever work? If so, why not use them?

A. Even if in theory they could do something (which is highly debatable), they are still very spiritually negative and ultimately will not bring a person to happiness. Acquiring something through magic or sorcery is the spiritual equivalent of stealing it with a gun. Any items or success which are truly coming to us and are for our ultimate benefit, God will give us without resorting to charms, sorcery or any similar 'spiritual robbery.'

Q. What's the difference between superstition and religious practices?

A. The religious practices of the Torah are all based on God's revealing to us how he would like us to live our lives. While it is true that these practices involve doing things on a level beyond purely physical or materialist considerations and understandings - they are entirely different from superstition, which are simply baseless practices, or sorcery, which futilely try to 'get around God' by manipulating the spiritual world that He created.

## Parsha Games

<http://www.aje.org.uk/harayon/>

### K-2

The Torah teaches us to look after trees because they are very important for us

#### **Middah/ Jewish Value**

- **Looking after trees**

#### **Activity**

**Some trees give us fruit, some give us shade in hot weather and we use the wood from other trees to make things.**

- 1. Ask the children to list all the fruits they can think of. Describe some more unusual fruits and try to get the children to name the fruit. You may want to show some pictures of fruits growing on trees.**
- 2. Ask the children to name things made of wood that they can find in the home, the school and the synagogue.**

### 3-4

The Torah tells us in this parashah that we may not cut down fruit trees, because they are a source of food for us

#### **Middah/ Jewish Value**

- **Looking after trees**

#### **Activity**

Although we may not cut down fruit trees some trees can be cut down and used for other necessary purposes. Discuss some of the things that trees are used for.

## 5-6

The parashah opens with a demand that there should be fair courts of law in Israel

### **Middah/ Jewish Value**

- **Justice and being fair**

### **Activity**

In Jewish law we must be careful to choose judges who will be impartial and wholly fair. This principle is one that should apply to all nations.

#### Discussion

What could happen if we did not 'judge' people fairly?

Think of examples in our own lives where we 'judge' and are 'judged'.

Some examples are:

- football referees
- headteachers
- parents