

## Challenging riddles, enigmas, logic problems and mind-benders, all with a Jewish twist.

Jews have always been a puzzling people. In both senses of the word. We have certainly caused consternation and bewilderment over the ages (just contemplate the mysteries of gefilte fish, for example). And we have, by and large, always enjoyed a good intellectual mind-bender.

From dreidels to Dungeons & Dragons, Jews have enjoyed a tradition of *dreying* their *kops*. And you'll find plenty that will cause you to do just that in this book. In these pages you'll find some classic puzzles, lovingly collected over the years. You'll also encounter brand new ones, created especially for this book. Each contains a bit of a Jewish twist to add to the flavor. But, like they used to say about the rye bread...

*You don't have to be Jewish to enjoy this book!*

So strain your brain and try your hand at these kosher conundrums, and if you do well, then congratulate yourself and say: Puzzle Tov!



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## Introduction

Jews have always been a puzzling people. In both senses of the word. We have certainly caused consternation and bewilderment over the ages (just contemplate the mysteries of gefilte fish, for example). And, we have, as a people, always enjoyed a good intellectual challenge. Examples abound.

The Passover Seder comes to mind with its refrain of “Who Knows One?” in which the entire spectrum of Jewish theology is laid out in a “One-Two Buckle My Shoe” guessing game.

Jewish sacred texts, such as the Talmud, are filled with brain-benders and riddles. “How do you divide an estate so that everyone is treated fairly?” And don’t get me started on gematria!

From dreidels to Dungeons & Dragons, Jews have always loved a good mental challenge. And that’s why I wrote this book. It contains some of my favorite puzzles, lovingly collected over the years. Some of them I created and some I have borrowed. I’ve tried to give each one a bit of a Jewish twist to add to the flavor. But, like they used to say about the rye bread...

You Don’t Have To Be Jewish to Enjoy This Book!

## PUZZLE TOV!

You'll notice that I've rated the difficulty of each puzzle on a one (easiest) to five (hardest) Jewish star scale.

If you have a favorite kosher-style brain-teaser, please send it to me and, if I like it, I'll include it in a future edition. Also send along any corrections you discover.

Send it to: [peter@peterweisz.com](mailto:peter@peterweisz.com) with the words "Puzzle Tov" in the subject line.

Meanwhile, try your hand at these kosher conundrums and, if you do well, then congratulate yourself and say: Puzzle Tov!

Peter Weisz,  
March 2017

### DIFFICULTY KEY

- ★ = Easy Peasy
- ★ ★ = Not too tough
- ★ ★ ★ = Make your mother proud.
- ★ ★ ★ ★ = Oy! Mein Kop!
- ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ = Maven level



## The Rabbi's Children

My rabbi, who loves puzzles, has three children.

"How old are your children, Rabbi?" I asked him one day.

"Well, let's see if you can use your Jewish knowledge to figure it out," he replied. "The product of their ages is double-*chai*."

"So if I multiply their ages together, I'll get 36, right?" I said.

"That's right," said the rabbi.

"Well, that's not enough to go on," I complained. "What do you get if you add up their three ages?"

"You get a number that's equal to the bar mitzvah age," he said with a smile.

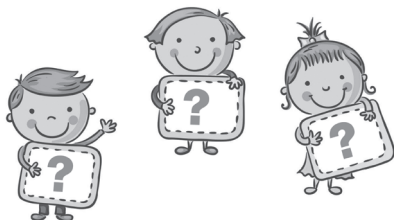
I thought for a second.

"Still not enough information," I said. "Tell me something more, please."

"My oldest child is left-handed."

"Aha!" I shouted. "Got it!"

How old are the rabbi's three children?





## The Black Hat Bargain

Shlomo's family are Chasidim. He just turned 14 and received a big black hat from his father, who happens to be a casino manager and loves to play betting games.

Shlomo has been receiving a \$5 per week allowance for nearly two years. Now that he has his own black hat, he thinks that it's time for a raise and tells his Dad:

"I need to go to ten dollars per week, Abba."

After a bit of thought, his father responds:

"Well, I can't okay that, but I will make you a proposition, if you feel like taking a gamble."

"What is it this time, Abba?" Shlomo moans while rolling his eyes.

"Here's the deal. I have right here ten ten-dollar bills. And here I have ten one-dollar bills," he said, placing all twenty bills in front of Shlomo. He then took off his own black hat and placed it upside down on the table. He asked for Shlomo's new hat and did the same, placing the two hats side by side.

"Each week, and if you agree, I will give you the opportunity of distributing all twenty bills into the two hats in any way you choose. Once you've done that, you'll be blindfolded. I will then move the hats so you won't know which is on the right or on the left. It will then be your job to indicate one of the two hats by saying right or left. You then reach into the hat you have picked and

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draw out one, and only one, bill. Whatever you pick, you keep. Pick a ten, keep a ten. Pick a one, you get a one. *Vershtayst?*” Shlomo said he understood.

*A few ground rules:*

Shlomo is not permitted to fold, or otherwise attach one bill to another when he distributes the bills.

Shlomo is not permitted to mark, or in any other way alter the feel, smell, taste or sound of the bills.

Shlomo must place ALL of the bills into the hats. How many of each denomination he places into each hat is up to him, but each one of the twenty bills must be placed into one of the two hats.

*Two Questions:*

Without coming up with any further strategy, should Shlomo accept the proposition or should he stick with the \$5 per week allowance?

Is there some way of arranging the bills so that Shlomo’s chances of selecting a ten-dollar bill are increased?





## The Eruv Ropes

In the old days, the gabbai was the fellow who took care of all the day-to-day business at a synagogue. Two important tasks he was responsible for was taking down the eruv rope at the end of Shabbat and for conducting the weekly Havdalah service.

The eruv is the roped off area around the synagogue, the “walled garden,” in which Jews could carry things without violating the Sabbath. It was marked by a long piece of rope that was put up on Friday at sunset and taken down on Saturday also at sunset.

The gabbai had no watch or clock, but he knew that Havdalah had to start exactly 45 minutes after sunset. He also knew that if he cut a piece of the rope to a certain length and then lit the end, it would burn for exactly one hour.

The problem was that the rope didn't burn evenly. It could burn slowly for a while and then speed up and then slow down and so on. But it always took exactly one hour to burn the entire length.

The gabbai used two pieces of such rope of equal length and some matches to determine when 45 minutes had elapsed.

How did he do it?





## The Dishonest Waiter

Three mothers put on a joint birthday party for their kids at Moishe's Kosher Deli. When the waiter brought the bill, it came to exactly \$300 including the tip.

Each mother pulled out a \$100 bill and gave it to the waiter who turned the money in to Moishe. Moishe double-checked the bill and found that the waiter had made a mistake. The total should only have been \$250.

"Here," he said to the waiter, "here's a twenty and three tens. Go give this back to the mothers and apologize that you overcharged them."

The waiter took the \$50 but on the way he decided that it was just too hard to divide \$50 three ways, so instead he gave each of the mothers back \$10. He pocketed the remaining \$20. "They'll never know the difference," he thought to himself.

Each of the mothers paid \$100 and got back \$10, thereby paying \$90 each.

\$90 times three is \$270. This is the total that was paid by all three mothers.

Add this to the \$20 in the waiter's pocket and you get only \$290.

What happened to the missing \$10?





## What's So Special?

A rabbi told his pupils to study this paragraph and all things in it:

“What is vitally wrong with it? Probably, nothing in it is truly wrong, but you must admit that it is most unusual. Don't just zip through it quickly, but study it scrupulously – just as you would do with Torah. With luck you should spot what is so particular about this paragraph and the words found in it. Can you now say what it is? If not, tax your brains and try again. Don't miss a word or a symbol. It isn't all that difficult, you know.”

No pupil could do it. Can you?



## The Two Rabbis

An old rabbi and a young rabbi were seated next to each other on the bimah. The young rabbi was the son of the old rabbi, but the old rabbi was not the father of the young one. How do you explain this?





## The Switch Hitter

One fine day, Nate Goldstein got a call from a lawyer.

"I'm afraid I have some sad news," he said. "Your great-uncle Isadore passed away last week. You were named in the will. Could you meet me at the synagogue tomorrow morning and I'll explain."

Nate remembered that Uncle Izzy was a wealthy man, albeit a bit eccentric. Nate agreed to meet the lawyer and arrived at the shul the next morning where the attorney told him the following:

"Your great-uncle's will contained a strange provision. He wants you to turn on this little light bulb next to his brass name plaque every year on his *yahrzeit* – the anniversary day of his death. For this, his estate will pay you \$25,000 every year."

The lawyer showed Nate the name plate mounted on the wall of the sanctuary. Next to it was a little light bulb. It was not turned on.

"Of course," said Nate. "I'll be glad to do it. Where's the light switch?"

"That's just it," answered the lawyer. "There's a hitch."

"A hitch?"

"Yes, a hitch with the switch. Follow me." The lawyer led Nate to the Rabbi's office behind the bimah and pointed to a wall plate containing three light switches. Nate was puzzled:

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“But there are three switches and I can’t see the little light bulb from here. How do I know which of the switches controls the bulb?” Nate protested.

The lawyer replied: “That’s the hitch. Your great-uncle wanted to make sure that whoever was going to handle this job was highly intelligent. So he devised a little test. Here’s how it works:

One and only one of these three switches controls the light bulb. Right now the bulb is off and all three switches are in the OFF position. You will be able to fiddle around with the switches for five minutes. After that you will be able to go back into the sanctuary and observe the bulb. At that point, if you can identify which of the switches controls the bulb, then you get the job. \$25,000 every year just to flick a switch. Are you interested?”

As Nate thought this over the lawyer explained further: “You must work alone and cannot use any equipment, such as a camera, to help you. There is no way to tell from the rabbi’s office if the light is on or off. After you go in to the sanctuary and observe the bulb, you may not return to the switches. Got it?” Nate said that he understood and told the lawyer to start the clock.

After five minutes Nate was able to correctly identify which of the three switches controlled the light bulb. How did he do it?

