



CLEVER RACHEL

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Two youngsters, Rachel and Jacob, learn the importance of putting differences aside and working together as they solve tricky riddles that change lives.

Though their schooling is gender-specific (as it often was for boys and girls long ago), both Jacob and Rachel are considered clever. Both children enjoy words, their meaning, and the ways in which words can form puzzles.

Consider with your children:

- What does “clever” really mean?
- Are there differences between cleverness and wisdom?
- Is either Rachel or Jacob wise?
- How does a person become wise?

In *Pirkei Avot* (*The Ethics of the Fathers*), the 2nd-century scholar Ben Zoma provides this insight: “Who is wise? One who learns from every human being.” During the course of *Clever Rachel*, both children learn valuable lessons about working together, kindness, and humility.

Eventually, every child must deal with others who have more experience, knowledge, or ability. How will they cope? From an early age, talk with your children about areas in which they have talent; chat also about their friends who excel. We offer our children a precious gift by helping them develop a realistic view of themselves and others.

Like this book’s young characters, all people find themselves in situations that call for an apology. How do we react when we make mistakes? In what tone and with what degree of sincerity do we admit errors? Jewish tradition offers the concept of *teshuvah* (repentance). The 12th-century philosopher and Torah scholar Maimonides gave a four-part recipe for a successful apology:

1. recognize and regret the error;
2. apologize sincerely to the hurt person;
3. make a commitment not to repeat the error;
4. follow-through with better behavior.

The act of apologizing can be extremely difficult. Consider a family dialogue in which everyone can role-play appropriate ways to apologize. With this practice, the right words will come more easily when necessary.