

ABSTRACT

SOLVING A RIDDLE OF JUDAH HALEVI

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R. Judah Halevi's poetic *œuvre* contains a significant section of literary riddles. The article is devoted to one of the most opaque of the poet's riddles, the short poem beginning with אֵיךְ יִפְתָּר, which has hitherto been misunderstood by modern scholars. While the solution given in the standard edition of Halevi's work is uncertain, the present article offers the correct explanation of the poem: it is shown to be a sophisticated linguistic puzzle, whose 'solution' can apply to any of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. This explanation was in fact well known among the early modern readers of the poem, whether or not they knew it was written by its illustrious author. The recurrence of an identical explanation of the poem in various unrelated sources from different localities also sheds light on the transmission of pre-modern Hebrew poetry.