Profiles in the Pandemic: Rabbi Akiva Eiger & the Cholera Epidemic of 1831

1. **Who was Rabbi Akiva Eiger?**
2. Born 1761 (Eisenstadt Hungary) - Died 1837 (Posen, Prussia)
* Son of Rav Moshe Ginz & Gittel Eiger[[1]](#footnote-1) [[2]](#footnote-2)
* Identified as a spiritual prodigy[[3]](#footnote-3) but of weak physical demeanor his entire life
* Married first wife, Glikel of Lisa at 20 years old[[4]](#footnote-4). His father in law was a wealthy person who bought the young couple a large home and arranged it so that Rabbi Akiva Eiger could focus his energies on learning. 1790 (8 years later) his father in law died and a fire destroyed his home/Yeshiva and he needed to seek a job.
* Takes his first Rabbinate in Markis-Friedland, Western Prussia for 24 years but community could not afford him. – director of Tzedaka, and of the oppressed. Worked until it became apparent that the community couldn’t afford him.
	+ Noted he didn’t want to make money off Torah preferring to be a night watchman or a Shamash and applied for a job as a bathhouse manager.
	+ Marries his daughter (a widow) to the Chasam Sofer whom he had written seeking a “widow” who might be appropriate. Both men worry that each is not worthy enough to hold his end of the deal
	+ Begins writng many quality Halacha works
* 1812 – Chasam Sofer helps him get the job in Posen (he was 51 at the time). Difficulty in getting the official title and Nesivos (Rav Yaakov Loberbaum) stepped in – resolved in 1815 with glowing Ksav.
1. **1831 – famous Cholera Epidemic hits Russian/Prussian border**
2. **Michteivei Rabbi Akiva Eiger #146 (also cited in Chiddushei Rabbi Akiva Eiger Nedarim 39a <Trans. Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner)**

His honour’s letter has reached me, regarding prayer in the synagogue.

In my view, it is true that gathering in a small space is inappropriate, but it possible to pray in groups, each one very small, about 15. They should begin with first light and then have another group, and each one should have a designated time to come pray there. The same for minchah.

And after each prayer, evening and morning, they should recite Tehillim, certain psalms which his honour should select, and then the text of Kel rachum sh’mecha, Aneinu Hashem aneinu, Mi she’anah, and the Y’hi ratzon after Tehillim, mentioning in it the king, may Gd protect him, and his children and nobles and all who live in his land.

And every morning and evening, after reciting the portion of the daily korban communally, they should recite the entire text of the incense, Atah hu shehiktiru etc. And to say afterward the Ribon text printed in the ma’amadot for Sunday after the ketoret.

And they should be careful that people beyond the aforementioned quota not push their way into the synagogue, perhaps via a guard from the police to oversee this. Once they have reached the number, they should not allow others to enter until that group is finished. Set this request before the magistrate, and that I have written this instruction for you. And if they refuse, it would be good to arrange it with the local authorities. You will certainly succeed if you mention my name, that I have instructed you not to have large gatherings in the synagogue in a small space, and that I have advised you of these arrangements, and have cautioned you to recite Tehillim and pray for the king as well, may Gd protect him.

His honour should collect, for each person, from small to great and even infants in their mother’s womb, six large coins, and from that his honour should fund saving of lives. And if his honour wishes to send me from this sum to save lives, I will do it wholeheartedly, and the money will be distributed to the needy.

And they should be very careful not to become cold. It would be good for each person here to wear flannel, belted over his belly. Not to eat bad foods, especially gherkins, and to reduce eating fruit and fish and drinking alcohol, not to eat past satiation, and better to eat a lot over many times, but each time not to eat a lot.

Be clean; don’t leave any filth or dirt in the home. This includes changing to clean clothing multiple times during the weak. Do not worry, distance yourself from any kind of sadness. Don’t walk about the city at night; during the middle of the day, when the sun shines, it is good to stroll in the fields for air, and to open the windows in the morning so that air will enter the rooms. Don’t go outside on an empty stomach, eat some grains of mustard and take reinda from eichenholtz. Take water and wash your face and hands with it every morning. Wash the floors of the rooms several times with strong vinegar, better if mixed with rose water.



1. **The Yamim Noraim Takanaos for 1831 (HaMaayan VI:p. 9-12)**
* Limits on space – “Space distancing” 



* Rebbetzins treated like Rabbis



* Rules for House minyanim



* Time limits for davening (and limits on Payat) (There were similar ones for davening itself)



* Eating was required before davening



* But Yom Kippur was NOT cancelled



* Saying Kaddish – a lasting effect

1. **How things played out**

**Report to the Emporer Friedrick Wilhelm (III) <Rabbi Akiva Eiger V”Chayav p. 82>**



**The Emperor’s Proclamation**



1. **The Hospital affair**







1. His Mother was identified as a Tzadeikes & Lamdan “as good as a man” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. He continued to use the name “Ginz in personal correspondence but was listed as an “Eiger” family as it was more recognized in the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Parents kept him close to home during his formative years choosing to let him enter the Yeshiva at Breslau only at the ripe old age of 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. They had a great relationship and he was physical broken when she died 3 months after the wedding of their first daughter in 1796 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)