TABLETALK

ACHIM
CONNECTING JEWS, TOGETHER!

MADE POSSIBLE IN PART THROUGH A GRANT FROM THE STAR-K VAAD HAKASHRUS

SEPTEMBER 2025 CHOL HA'MOED SUCCOS WWW.ACHIM.ORG ISSUE 462 VOLUME 9

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

STOLEN CASH IN THE MIKVAH

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

One morning, Yanky went to the mikvah. It was early, and no one else was there except for two other people: an elderly Yid and a younger fellow.

While he was there, Yanky realized he had cash in his pocket. He knew it was a mistake to bring money to the mikvah, but at that point, what could he do? He had 1,800 shekels. He remembered noting the exact denominations: seven 200-shekel bills followed by four 100-shekel bills, in that precise order.

He put the money back in his pocket and went into the mikvah. Afterward, the two others, the younger fellow and the elderly Yid, went in. As Yanky started getting dressed, he reached into his pocket and discovered the money was gone.

DESERT DWELLERS

The Torah tells us the reason we celebrate the holiday of Succos is because, in the desert, HaShem housed us in Succos. The Talmud debates whether the Torah's intent was that HaShem gave us actual tents, or whether He protected us with the Clouds of Glory. The Vilna Gaon gives yet another reason. On Yom Kippur, HaShem accepted the people with the same love He had for them before the sin of the Golden Calf. On that day, He gave Moshe the second set of Luchos to replace the first ones. With that acceptance, HaShem gave Moshe the mitzvah to build the Mishkan, through which His Presence would dwell among the people. During the four days following Yom Kippur, all the raw materials were collected for the construction of the Mishkan, and on the fifth day the people were ready to begin building. The Vilna Gaon explains that this is why we celebrate Succos at this time of year, and not immediately after leaving Egypt.

Behold, it appears that the Vilna Gaon is suggesting a third reason that is not mentioned in the Talmud. Although his point is to explain why the holiday is celebrated in the fall and not in the spring, nevertheless, it introduces a new reason for the celebration.

On Shabbos, one is limited in how far he may walk. A person may not walk more than 2,000 amos beyond the city limit. This limit is called "t'chum." If, for example, one was in the forest when Shabbos began, he is limited to 2,000 amos in each direction. If he lived in a small village, his limit extends 2,000 amos from the boundary of the village, the city itself is not included in those 2,000 amos. If, for example, he lived in a city that was 100 square miles, he may walk the entire city plus 2,000 amos beyond its borders in each direction.

The thought crossed his mind: maybe one of the other men had taken it.

He looked at the clothing hanging on the hooks. Assuming the elderly Yid was honest, he went over to the younger fellow's clothing. He felt around in the pockets but found nothing. Then he checked the man's shoes. Lifting the insole, he discovered cash hidden underneath.

It looked exactly like the bills Yanky had lost, same denominations, same order: seven 200s and four 100s.

Convinced this was enough evidence, Yanky assumed the money had to be his. As far as he knew, no one else had entered the mikvah, and here was the exact amount of money, in the exact same order, hidden in this person's shoe.

So, he took the money and went home without saying anything.

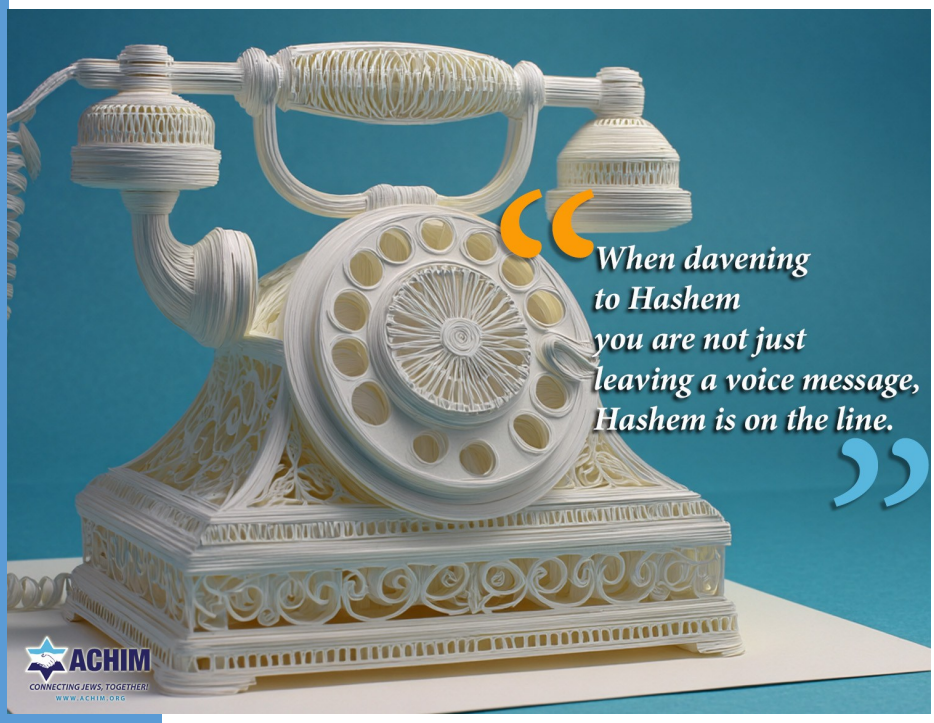
Later, he told his wife what had happened. But the more he thought about it, the more unsure he became. Had he done the right thing? He decided to ask a rov. On one hand, it seemed obvious that the money was his. On the other hand, he couldn't be 100% certain, and he hadn't spoken to the younger fellow or asked any questions.

He wasn't sure what the halacha was. Should he keep it? Should he try to find the owner? Should he track down the young man and ask him directly?

What do you think?

(See Vehaarev Na, Volume Four, p. 264.)

MITZVA MEME



The Talmud (Eruvin 56b) discusses a group of Bedouins who live in temporary dwellings and move from place to place. Do we consider their settlement a small town, so the t'chum begins from the "city" boundary, or do we view each hut as an individual house, meaning they do not form a single city? The Talmud explains that since these dwellings are temporary, they do not constitute a "city."

The Talmud then cites a source indicating that when our people traveled through the desert, the entire encampment, home to 2.5 million people, was considered one "city." A Jew living at one end of the camp was permitted to walk to the other end and then continue another 2,000 amos. Our forefathers dwelled in temporary tents, yet the camp was considered a city. This is the Talmud's question.

The Talmud answers that the desert dwellers were unique because they encamped and broke camp by the Word of HaShem. Why should the fact that HaShem determined when to camp and when to travel change the temporary nature of their dwellings?

Perhaps the understanding is that when our people traveled in the desert, they were always in HaShem's embrace. HaShem was their permanent place. Whether they encamped in Chatzeiros or in Kadeish, they were always in His presence. HaShem Himself established "the place."

Similarly, when a baby is in her mother's arms, it does not matter where the mother is standing. Whether she is in Cleveland or in Baltimore, the baby is always in the same place—in her mother's arms.

Perhaps the two explanations of the Talmud, together with the Vilna Gaon's teaching, are all pointing to the same principle. Succos commemorates that HaShem rested His Presence among His people, evident through the Clouds of Glory and through the Mishkan. The significance of remembering that HaShem gave us huts is that those huts became permanent homes because His Presence dwelled among us, giving us a true sense of place.

Have a beautiful Yom Tov and a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind




SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE PATAGONIAN MARA: THE FASTEST (AND MOST SURPRISING) RODENT

Is it a dear? Is it a rabbit? Imagine walking across the dry, windswept plains of Argentina. Suddenly, a flash of movement catches your eye. Something bursts from the brush, leaping high into the air before bounding away on long, powerful legs. At first, you might think you've seen a small deer. Or maybe a giant rabbit. Or even some kind of kangaroo on the wrong continent. But no, what you've spotted is something else entirely. It's a Patagonian mara, one of the strangest, most fascinating animals in South America.

This remarkable rodent looks like it is half deer and half rabbit. Its body is long and lean like a small deer, standing nearly two feet tall at the shoulder. Its head has the soft, rounded features of a kangaroo, with large dark eyes and a twitching nose. Its ears stand tall like a rabbit's, swiveling toward every sound. And its back legs? Long, muscular, and built for speed, more like an antelope or deer than any rodent you've ever seen. Its feet are narrow and compressed, almost hoof-like, which helps it run swiftly over hard ground. A short tail tipped with white fur flashes as the animal dashes away, like a built-in signal flag. All these features combine to make the mara look like a mash-up of half a dozen other animals. But make no mistake, it's not a deer, a rabbit, or a kangaroo. The mara is a rodent, and a very big one at that. It is actually related to a guinea pig!

Living on open plains requires the Patagonian mara to be a master of movement. With so few places to hide from predators, survival depends on speed and agility. And wow, does the mara deliver!

When danger strikes, a mara can sprint up to 43 miles per hour. That's as fast as a greyhound racing dog and nearly as quick as a galloping horse. This makes the mara one of the speediest rodents on Earth.

But it doesn't stop there. Maras have a special way of escaping threats called "stotting." This is a style of bounding where they leap high into the air with all four feet leaving the ground at once. Each jump can reach up to six feet high. Not only does this confuse predators, but it also shows just how strong and athletic these rodents really are. Some scientists believe that stotting might even act as a signal: a way of saying, "I'm too strong to catch, don't even bother chasing me!"

And if their sprinting and stotting weren't enough, maras are versatile movers. They can switch from galloping like a deer, to hopping like a kangaroo, to darting like a rabbit. It's as if they've borrowed the best running styles from across the animal kingdom.

For such quiet-looking animals, maras have a surprisingly large vocabulary. They use grunts, squeaks, and whistles to communicate with each other. A threatened mara might chatter its teeth to warn off danger. During grooming or close contact, they mutter a series of soft, short grunts. And when it's really time to sound the alarm, their whistles carry far across the grasslands.

These sounds are especially important because maras live in open environments where it's easy to see and be seen. Quick communication helps them keep track of each other and alert their families when predators are near.

Unlike many other rodents that scurry about at night, the Patagonian mara is a diurnal animal, which means it's most active during the day. On cool mornings, you might find them basking in the sunlight, soaking up warmth before setting out to graze. Spending time in the sun not only helps regulate their body temperature but also gives them time to rest, watch for predators, and groom one another.

Like many grazers, Patagonian maras are strict herbivores. They munch on grasses, herbs, and the occasional fruit, pulling up plants with their sharp front teeth. Their digestive system is uniquely designed to handle tough, fibrous vegetation. While they're not true ruminants like cows, their stomach has multiple chambers that help break down plant material.

One of the most surprising facts about the Patagonian mara is its mating life. While most rodents are far from picky when it comes to mates, maras are different. They form monogamous pairs, a male and female that stay together for life. That's almost unheard of in the rodent world! Once a pair bonds, they stick side by side, traveling, resting, and even grooming together. A male mara is especially protective of his partner. He'll follow her closely wherever she goes, marking the ground around her with his scent to create a sort of "mobile territory." This moving boundary warns other males to stay away.

When it comes time to raise young, maras show another fascinating behavior. Instead of each pair raising their pups alone, many pairs come together to share a large communal burrow known as a crиche. Dozens of baby maras may be sheltered inside at once, forming what looks like a bustling underground nursery.

The pups are born well-prepared for life outside the burrow. Unlike many rodents that are born blind and helpless, mara pups are born with eyes open, fur on their bodies, and the ability to run within hours. Still, they're vulnerable to predators, which is why the communal crиche is so important. It's safety in numbers.

Each mother knows her pups by smell and sound. When it's time to nurse, she calls them out of the burrow, carefully picking out only her own young from the crowd. Watching a mother mara reunite with her pups is a reminder of how strong and precise the instincts Hashem created can be.

The Patagonian mara lives only in Argentina, scattered across open grasslands, dry plains, and scrublands. They thrive in places where they can spot predators from a distance, giving them time to rely on their speed and agility. Foxes, wildcats, and birds of prey are among their main hunters, but maras are well-equipped to make a quick escape.

Thank you Hashem for Your wondrous world!

THE PLOT WAS DEFEATED

Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky (pictured as a younger man) was a rav in the town of Tzitevyan before he came to America in the mid-1930s. At one point, the butchers in the nearby town of Shideleveh became incensed when their rav ruled certain animals as treif. In retaliation, they framed him and spread rumors that he had been found in compromising and highly inappropriate circumstances.

But Reb Yaakov quickly put an end to their scheme. "If you have suspicions concerning your rav," he told the people of Shideleveh, "then you must also have suspicions concerning your mikveh. And if so, there must be suspicions concerning all the children born in Shideleveh. In that case, I must prohibit anyone from Tzitevyan from marrying anyone from your town."

The message was clear, and the plot was defeated.

THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the store owner who dropped a large box of shoes on a potential thief, Rabbi Zilberstein (V"N Vol. 4, p. 250) wrote that although the store owner was negligent when he dropped it, he is nonetheless not obligated to pay damages. This is because one is permitted to harm a thief in order to prevent a theft. Therefore, even though his actions began as negligence, it turned out that he was allowed to cause the damage.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in memory of
שמואל בן ישראל
whose yartzeit is י"ט תשרי
By Reb Reuven and Naomi Miller
It is also dedicated in honor of the yartzeit of the Vilna Gaon זכותו יגן עלינו