



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE BROKEN SCREENS

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Yaakov was a businessman who loved learning. One day, he was on a flight from Eretz Yisroel to Chutz La'aretz. As soon as the plane took off, he took out his Gemara, planning to learn, do Daf Yomi, and review what he had studied.

He noticed that around him, people were trying to turn on their screens to watch videos on the monitors in front of them, but they weren't successful. People looked frustrated, repeatedly pressing buttons, but nothing happened. He heard complaints that the screens weren't working.

It turned out that, for whatever reason, the power to the screens was out, so no one was able to watch any in-flight entertainment.

Yakov actually thought it was



IT'S NOT WHAT HE DID, IT'S WHO HE WAS

Maharal (Netzach chapter 11) explains that HaShem's choice of Avraham to be the father of His people was not based on any merit of Avraham. To underscore this point the Torah does not introduce Avraham as being righteous, as it did when introducing Noach. Although there were incidents which demonstrated Avraham's commitment to HaShem before HaShem first spoke with him, nevertheless, the Torah wants us to recognize that HaShem chose Avraham because of who he was and not because of what he did. The choice was not based on merit or worthiness.

This is a very important insight. If the choice was based on worthiness then we could never be secure in our unique relationship with HaShem, because the moment we lose our worthiness we would be disposed of, Heaven forbid. However, since the choice was based on who Avraham was; meaning his core essence then by extension his descendants as well were chosen as having that same core essence. Therefore, even when we are not worthy to be His people, if we will not be meritorious, we will nevertheless remain in our relationship of being His chosen people, because we are who we are.

Maharal continues to explain what it was about Avraham that earned the choice of HaShem. "The Jewish people have an inherent perfection that is similar to HaShem's Perfection."

amazing. This way, he could learn in peace. He wouldn't get distracted or see anything inappropriate. He was thrilled that the video monitors weren't working.

Meanwhile, other passengers continued to complain. At the end of the flight, the crew made an announcement: anyone who was inconvenienced by the lack of in-flight entertainment could submit a request for reimbursement.

Yakov now faced a dilemma. The reimbursement implied that passengers were upset or inconvenienced, but the truth was that he was actually delighted that there was no entertainment. In fact, he might have been willing to pay extra for such a distraction-free flight!

So he wondered: was he allowed to request the reimbursement like everyone else? Could he accept money for "missing out" on something he didn't want in the first place?

On one hand, you could argue that he shouldn't, he wasn't damaged or deprived in any way.

On the other hand, the offer was made to all passengers equally, without distinction. You could also argue that, in theory, he could have watched a kosher video if the screens had worked, so perhaps he's still entitled to it.

What do you think? Is Yaakov allowed to request reimbursement like everyone else?

See Vahaarev Na Volume Four Hebrew Edition, Page 356

MITZVA MEME



So many of our difficulties come from expectations. If your cup is half full, maybe you simply need a smaller cup.



*-Rebbetzin
Esther Tendler*



What is this 'perfection' that Maharal refers to? Perhaps we can apply Malbim's insight to appreciate Avraham's special quality as follows.

The Talmud teaches that before a Jew is born he studies the Torah in utero by the light of a candle and upon birth he is administered a binding oath 'be righteous and do not be wicked'. The Talmud references a verse in Psalm 24. In his commentary of Tehillim, Malbim explains that when the Talmud states that he is administered this oath it is metaphor referring to the two factors that draw a person to do good and to be good. These two factors are so compelling that the Talmud compares them to a binding oath.

The first factor is that Man's neshama is a spark of Ha-

Shem and it is naturally drawn to connect back to HaShem and to be good and worthy of returning to Him. The second factor is his intelligence, his insight and his numerous good midos with which HaShem blesses every Jew. Between these two factors every Jew is drawn to be good. Even when he might fail there is an internal compass that speaks to him. It makes him aware that something needs to be corrected. The Malbim seems to be describing the conscience of the Jew. It drives him to find the right path of life.

At the end of history HaShem's people will be the one nation that will properly represent HaShem's Presence in this world. In spite of all the challenges that threatened to shake us from our faith and in spite of the many generations that actually rejected HaShem and His Torah, at the end we will come back because of Avraham's special quality. His quality is what endures to the end of time in keeping us loyal to HaShem and to His Torah.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

TAAL VOLCANO: THE VOLCANO THAT THINKS IT'S A MATRYOSHKA DOLL

Listen to this geological riddle. Where is there an island in a lake on an island volcano in a lake on an island? If you stood on a hill overlooking the vast, blue waters of Taal Lake in the Philippines, you might think you were gazing at a peaceful paradise, a glassy lake ringed by green hills, with a small island sitting quietly in its center. But look closer. That island isn't just any island, it's the top of a living volcano! And that volcano holds a secret so strange it sounds like something out of a dream: it's really an island in a lake on an island in a lake on an island. Welcome to Taal Volcano, a masterpiece of Hashem's creation, a place where earth, water, and fire all meet in one breathtaking display.

Taal is like a geological riddle, each layer hides another inside. The great island of Luzon, the largest in the Philippines, holds Taal Lake in its heart. In that lake rises Volcano Island, and inside the volcano's crater sits another lake, its Crater Lake. And a tiny island called Vulcan Point pokes through that inner lake!

Imagine paddling a canoe across Taal Lake, stepping onto Volcano Island, hiking to the rim, and then looking down into a lake with another island floating in it. You'd be standing on an island in a lake on an island in a lake on an island! No other place on Earth quite matches that dizzying, wonderful complexity.

This beauty was born from fire. Thousands of years ago, massive eruptions blew open the landscape, leaving behind a huge crater, a caldera, that slowly filled with water. Over time, smaller eruptions built new cones and ridges in the middle, forming Volcano Island itself. Instead of one single towering mountain, Taal became a tangled family of overlapping cones and craters, each one a chapter in its fiery story.

Despite its small size, it rises only about 300 meters above the lake, Taal is one of the most active and dangerous volcanoes on Earth. Don't let its modest height fool you. This little mountain has a mighty temper.

For centuries, Taal has shaped the lives of the people who live around it. Since 1572, it has erupted more than 30 times. The worst of these events have changed not only the land but even the nature of the lake itself.

In 1754, Taal rumbled for nearly seven months, roaring, spitting ash, and throwing rocks high into the air. Towns that once stood proudly on the lake's edge disappeared beneath layers of ash. Rivers were choked, and the mouth of the lake that once opened to the sea was sealed shut. Slowly, saltwater gave way to fresh, and creatures that once swam in from the ocean faced a new challenge—survive in freshwater or vanish forever.

The survivors adapted in ways that astonished scientists. Today, Taal Lake is home to the only freshwater sardine in the world, the *Sardinella tawilis*. These small, silvery fish are living proof that life can thrive even after disaster. Long ago, the lake even held bull sharks, before they vanished when the lake's salty link to the ocean was cut off.

Because of its history and its closeness to the bustling cities of southern Luzon, scientists have named Taal one of the world's "Decade Volcanoes", 16 volcanoes chosen for special study because of their risk and importance. That means teams of volcanologists constantly watch it, measuring tremors, testing gases, and tracking even the slightest bulge or dip in the land.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, PHIVOLCS for short, has declared the entire Volcano Island a Permanent Danger Zone. No one is allowed to live there, though visitors used to hike

to the crater rim before recent eruptions made that unsafe.

Why is it so dangerous? Because Taal doesn't always erupt with lava flowing gently down its sides. Sometimes, it explodes violently, hurling ash, stones, and steam in every direction. It can unleash base surges, blistering clouds of hot gas and ash that race along the ground faster than a car. In 1965, one such surge swept across the lake and killed hundreds in seconds.

The most recent eruption came this week in late October 2025, when Taal once again reminded everyone of its restless nature. In a series of short but forceful bursts, the volcano sent gray plumes of steam and ash more than two kilometers into the air. Each explosion lasted only minutes, yet they were powerful enough to shake the lake and send ripples across its glassy surface. Sulfur fumes hung low over the water, and light ash dusted nearby towns.

Though smaller than the 2020 eruption, the impact was a sharp warning. PHIVOLCS raised its alert bulletins, urging residents and tourists to stay away from Volcano Island and to remain alert for sudden steam-driven blasts or gas surges. Scientists classified the events as phreatic and phreatomagmatic eruptions, steam and magma interacting in the crater's flooded vents.

The crater lake continues to change. After the October activity, new vents opened in the northeastern part of the main crater, and parts of the lake briefly turned a cloudy gray from stirred sediments and gas release. The scene looked otherworldly, steam rising from the crater, the air thick with the faint smell of sulfur, and the surrounding hills shimmering in the haze.

When Taal erupts, it doesn't just spew lava and ash, it can also unleash one of nature's most spectacular light shows: volcanic lightning. As billions of ash particles crash into each other in the rising cloud, they build up electric charges. Suddenly, the sky flashes with bolts of lightning that leap from the cloud to the ground, lighting up the night like a thunderstorm born of fire.

To scientists, Taal Volcano is like a living textbook. Every rumble, every wisp of steam, every change in the water's chemistry tells a story about what's happening deep inside the Earth. Beneath Taal lies a complex magma system, a churning mix of molten rock and gases that scientists are still working to understand.

By studying Taal, volcanologists learn more about how eruptions happen, how to predict them, and how to keep people safe. It's not just about one volcano, it's about unlocking the secrets of all volcanoes, and learning how our planet works from the inside out.

Deep underground, the same heat that fuels Taal's eruptions also provides a source of clean energy. Geothermal plants in the region tap into this heat, turning steam from Earth's depths into electricity. It's one more example of how humans can live alongside nature's power, not just fear it, but use it wisely.

The lake's Pansipit River, its only outlet, flows from Taal Lake to the nearby sea. Through it, the lake breathes and changes. During heavy rains or volcanic unrest, scientists keep a close watch on this river, because it can carry both life-giving water and deadly lahars, mudflows of ash and rock that can rush down during storms.

So next time you look at a photo of Taal Volcano, remember what lies beneath that tranquil lake and behind those green slopes. Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

MY HUSBAND JUST TEXTED ME ABOUT YOU

The Baltimore community is still reeling from the news of the sudden passing of Rabbi Moshe Hauer.

My friend Ovadia told me the following story: Ovadia had just moved to Baltimore from France in order to find a better chinuch opportunity for his son. He came with his family, arriving around Elul time. He didn't really know anyone yet and was living near Shaarei Zion.

On Erev Rosh Hashanah, not knowing where to daven, he decided to go to Shaarei Zion. The gabbai gave him a seat, which happened to be right next to Rabbi Hauer. Ovadia had no idea that Rabbi Hauer had any connection to Shaarei Zion. They exchanged greetings and spoke briefly.

Later, on Chol HaMoed Sukkos, Ovadia bumped into Rabbi Hauer again. He said "Shalom Aleichem," and they spoke more, about what Ovadia was doing in Baltimore, and how his family was settling in.

We know that on Shmini Atzeres, Rabbi Hauer passed away. Afterward, Ovadia went to be menachem avel. When Rebbetzin Hauer asked his name, Ovadia said, "You don't know me, but I just met your husband."

Mrs. Hauer responded, "Of course I know you. Your name is [so-and-so]. You live in [this place], and your children are in [this school]." She began listing a number of details about him.

Ovadia was shocked. "How do you know all this?" he asked.

She replied, "My husband just texted me about you, that there's a new family from France who moved to Baltimore, and we have to reach out to them."

That was Rabbi Hauer. Despite having countless responsibilities with leading the OU, and not even being the rav of that shul, he noticed a new person in town, and one of the last things he did was text his wife to make sure they welcomed a newcomer to the community.



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the sunflower seed shells that fell onto the cake, Rabbi Yitzchok Zilberstein (Veharev Na, Volume Four, page 268) answered that this case differs from one in which someone leaves a knife or a stone that falls down. A knife or a stone is objectively damaging, whereas these shells are only situationally damaging; they cause harm only if there happens to be an ice cream cake below them. Therefore, the person on top had the right to eat the seeds and leave the shells on his own porch, and he is not obligated to pay for the cake.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in memory of
Malka Esther Bas Shmuel, Rebetzen Esther Shuvalsky
May her neshama have an aliyah.

By her children, Rabbi Yakov Aron and Shani Shuvalsky, Rebetzen Tzivia Dinovitz and Dr. Yehuda and Tzipora Frager



Brad E. Kauffman Esquire and Kauffman and Forman P.A.
specializing in corporate and construction law,
estates, wills and trusts and business litigation.

