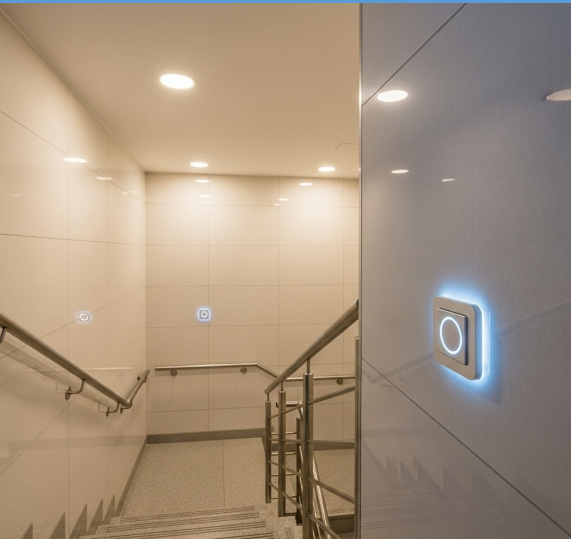




## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



### THE TIME-DELAY SWITCH

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

One of the many great parts of being in Eretz Yisrael for a while is that I now have a much better appreciation for some of the stories and halachic questions that happened here. I'll give you an example.

We stayed in an apartment for five weeks, and in the common area there was a time-delay light switch that would stay on for about 20 seconds. That's how long we had to punch in the combination to get into our apartment. Sometimes I would make it in time. But sometimes I wouldn't finish entering the code fast enough, and it would become pitch black. I'd have to rush back to the switch to turn the light back on, then start over again. It became a kind of comical race: could I put in the code fast enough to beat the light before it turned off?

This brings us to a real halachic question about the stairwell time-delay switch.



### NOT FOR HIMSELF

After many of our people were seduced by the Midyanites to perform Avoda Zara, Moshe ordered every Tribe to set up courts and punish all idolaters with capital punishment. Zimri, the prince of the Tribe of Shimon together with the princess of Midyan came before Moshe in front of the Mishkan to perform an act of public defiance against HaShem. To make matters worse, there was nobody who stood up against these two scoundrels to stop them to restore the Honor of HaShem.

Pinchas who was there could not tolerate this absolute chilul HaShem, took a spear, stabbed the two of them and lifted them up for all to see how they were killed in their act of defiance.

HaShem then told Moshe that Pinchas "avenged My honor among the people and I therefore did not wipe out the nation." HaShem was clearly stating that had Pinchas not taken action the Jewish people would have been destroyed. Even though it was only Zimri who performed this act of defiance, nevertheless, the fact that the people witnessed it and did not attempt to stop them makes them party to this defiance. As such, the entire nation who witnessed this deserved the punishment of HaShem's wrath. However, since Pinchas acted against Zimri, that settled HaShem's wrath and the Jewish people were spared.

It is worth noting how HaShem says Pinchas avenged My honor *among* the people. What is being said with the word "among"? We find this same word when the Torah describes to us what Pinchas did. "And Pinchas saw (the act) and got up *among* the nation and took his spear." Here too, the Torah highlights that Pinchas acted among the people. The implication is that Pinchas might have done the same act of avenging the honor of HaShem by himself, not among the people. What is the distinction between acting among the people and acting by himself?

It is important to appreciate how much mesiras nefesh (self sacrifice) Pinchas under-

There was once an apartment building in Israel where the stairwell time-delay switch broke. It was supposed to keep the light on for 30 seconds before turning off automatically.

The Vaad HaBayit (the condo association) hired an electrician named Chaim to come install a new timer switch. He came, did the job, and charged for his service. However, it turned out the switch he installed was faulty. When people pressed it, instead of turning off after 30 seconds, the light would stay on until it was manually switched off. This resulted in the lights being left on far longer than expected.

The Vaad called Chaim back and told him the switch wasn't working properly. He agreed to come, but he was busy and didn't return immediately. It ended up taking him five days to come back and fix the switch. During that time, whenever people turned on the stairwell light, it stayed on far longer than it should have, leading to an unusually high electricity bill of more than 300 shekels.

After the switch was finally fixed, the Vaad said to Chaim, "We'd like you to cover the electricity bill. This extra usage happened because you didn't install the switch properly."

Chaim responded, "I hear you. It's true that the switch I installed was faulty. But it's not really on me. People could have manually turned off the light during those five days. I shouldn't be responsible for all the electricity that was used."

So here's the question: Is Chaim, the electrician, obligated to pay the cost of the extra electricity because he installed a faulty switch and didn't come back right away to fix it? Or is it not his responsibility, since the residents could have turned off the light themselves?

What do you think?

See Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kama, page 305.

*If there were five more people  
in Am Yisrael with Ahavas  
Yisrael like Rav Yitzchak  
Zilberstein, Mashiach would  
have come by now.*

*-Rav Chaim  
Kanievsky*



took with his action. He killed a widely respected prince of Shimon who had an entire tribe of followers. Any one of them could have killed him. He also killed a princess of Midyan which may have cost his life. Many things could have gone wrong. In spite of these concerns Pinchos would tolerate such a blatant disgrace of HaShem's honor.

It is no wonder that in return for his dedicated allegiance to HaShem's honor he was awarded with the greatest spiritual elevation a person could achieve.

Getting back to our question what difference it made whether Pinchas acted among the people or if acted not among the people, the Sfás Emes explains that by acting among the people Pinchas was dedicating his act to be an act on behalf of his fellow members of his people. Pinchas did not do this because he wanted to be someone special. It was an act performed for the entire nation. In a similar way that one person can make Kiddush for many people if they will have in mind to fulfill the

mitzvah, in a similar fashion Pinchas wanted his act to be considered an act performed by his entire nation. Considering the mesiras nefesh Pinchas invested and at the same time he performed his act solely for his people and not for his own aggrandizement made him worthy of becoming the ancestor of most kohanim gedolim.

For this reason the Torah underscores that Pinchas got up *among* the people, for the sake of all Jews. This is how he settled the wrath of HaShem which was directed to the entire nation. This is why HaShem underscores this point when telling Moshe why Pinchas deserves his reward. It is because his act was attributed to every single Jew and not to himself.

The Sfás Emes adds one more point; the reason Moshe did not kill Zimri was because it needed to be a response from among the people. If he were to do it it would not have been considered as being done by the simple folk but rather by the leader. That would not have settled HaShem's wrath. It was the people who sinned and therefore the response needed to come from among the people.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**





## SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

### WHEN SHADOWS VANISH: THE MARVEL OF ZERO SHADOW DAY

Have you ever stood outside at noon, looked down, and watched your shadow stretch away from your feet like a faithful twin? Now imagine standing there one day, at just the right time, and poof! Your shadow vanishes. It's not hiding. It hasn't run away. It's just... gone. This magical moment is no trick. It's a real event, called Zero Shadow Day, and it happens in some places on Earth not just once, but twice a year! It's one of the coolest natural light shows our planet performs, and it's powered by nothing more than the Sun, Earth, and a beautiful bit of geometry. Let's explore this incredible event and uncover why it's such a jaw-dropping reminder of how amazing Hashem's world really is.

Zero Shadow Day, or ZSD for short, is exactly what it sounds like: a short period during the day when vertical objects, like flagpoles, lampposts, or even your own body, cast no visible shadow. It only happens around local noon, and only for a few magical minutes. But why? The secret lies in the Sun's position in the sky. Every day, the Sun moves from east to west across the sky. At noon, it reaches its highest point. But on ZSD, the Sun is exactly overhead, what scientists call the zenith. At that moment, sunlight hits the ground at a perfect 90-degree angle. Shadows fall directly underneath you instead of off to the side, making them almost impossible to see. That's what makes ZSD feel like a disappearing act.

To understand ZSD, we have to zoom out, to space! Earth spins on a tilted axis, about 23.5 degrees off-center. As our planet orbits the Sun, this tilt causes the Sun's rays to strike different parts of Earth more directly at different times of the year. It's what gives us seasons, and it also gives us Zero Shadow Days.

The Sun's direct rays don't stay still. They "travel" north and south over the course of a year, moving between two invisible lines circling Earth: the Tropic of Cancer (about 23.4° North) and the Tropic of Capricorn (about 23.4° South). If you live between these two lines, what scientists call the tropics, you're in luck. That's where ZSD can happen! In those tropical places, the Sun passes directly overhead twice a year. Once as it travels north after the March equinox, and once as it travels south after the June solstice. Each time, it brings with it the shadowless spectacle of ZSD. This back-and-forth movement is so regular and predictable, scientists often compare it to a windshield wiper, sweeping across the tropics in a graceful solar rhythm.

Long before people used telescopes or apps to track the Sun's movement, ancient cultures used their eyes, minds, and careful observation. Around 240 BCE, a Greek mathematician named Eratosthenes noticed something amazing. In the Egyptian city of Syene (modern-day Aswan), the Sun cast no shadow on the summer solstice. But at the same time, in Alexandria, a shadow was cast. That difference allowed him to calculate the size of the Earth, and he got surprisingly close to the correct answer!

Want to witness a Zero Shadow Day yourself? You'll need to be somewhere between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, a zone that includes places like India, Mexico, Brazil, Kenya, Indonesia, and, Hawaii.

Cities like Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad in India all have their own ZSDs, with dates that change slightly each year. In Honolulu,

the phenomenon typically happens around May 26 and July 16. But remember, ZSD doesn't last long, just a few minutes around noon, so you'll want to be ready and watching! And don't forget about clouds. Even a small one can block the Sun at just the wrong time and ruin the moment. That makes each successful sighting all the more special.

Some people who see ZSD for the first time describe it as almost unreal. Without shadows, objects seem flat or surreal, like they've been cut and pasted into the scene. A curving shadow that usually twists around a fence or a ring suddenly disappears. For a moment, everything looks like it's part of a perfectly staged photograph.

Some people joke about how Punxsutawney Phil, the famous groundhog in Pennsylvania, could never do his job if he lived in the tropics, because during ZSD, there'd be no shadow to see or avoid!

The disappearing shadow of ZSD isn't just a science fair trick, it's been written into the stones of history. Some of the world's most awe-inspiring ancient buildings were designed to align with the Sun's path. The Karnak Temple in Luxor, Egypt, and Chichen Itza in Mexico both sit in places that experience ZSD. Scientists and archaeologists believe these structures may have been designed to mark or celebrate the Sun's zenith. Whether for religious ceremonies, agricultural calendars, or royal symbolism, these monuments show that ancient civilizations understood the importance of the Sun's path, and maybe even the magic of disappearing shadows.

Today, Zero Shadow Day has become a superstar of science education. Schools across India and beyond hold workshops, live demonstrations, and outdoor events to mark the occasion. Some students build their own sundials or track the Sun's position throughout the day. Others use special apps to find out exactly when ZSD will arrive in their city. And best of all, anyone can join in. Whether you're a kindergartner or a college student, a curious neighbor or a backyard astronomer, ZSD invites everyone to look up, look down, and see something spectacular.

ZSD isn't just fun, it's evidence! The way the Sun strikes Earth directly overhead only between the tropics, and only on certain dates, would be impossible on a flat Earth. The phenomenon beautifully illustrates Earth's curved surface and tilted axis in a way that's visible with your own eyes.

That's what makes ZSD such a great "gateway science" moment. It doesn't require a telescope, a lab coat, or fancy equipment. All you need is sunlight, a stick, and your own sense of wonder. During ZSD, shadows are at their minimum length and fall directly beneath the gnomon (the stick or pointer of a sundial). That makes it an ideal moment to calibrate or test sundials with high accuracy, or build your own and track how shadows return and shift over the year.

Zero Shadow Day may last only a few minutes, but in that short time, it brings the cosmos down to Earth. It shows us how predictable and beautiful Hashem's universe is. It reminds us that even something as ordinary as a shadow is really part of a bigger story: the dance between Earth and the Sun.

**DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH MOSHE RABBEINU  
WAS WILLING TO GIVE JUST TO BE IN ERETZ  
YISRAEL FOR A THOUSANDTH OF A  
SECOND?**

In a few days, Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl would be flying to chutz la'aretz (outside the Land of Israel). His assistants said they would get him a first-class ticket, which is much more comfortable and spacious than economy class.

However, Rav Avigdor told them that he wanted to sit in economy class at the back of the plane. On the return trip, though, he would like to sit in first class at the front of the plane.

The request left them puzzled—what was the difference between the two flights?

When asked for an explanation, Rav Avigdor said, “I want to be in Eretz Yisrael for as long as possible.”

On the way out, economy class leaves Eretz Yisrael after first class. On the way back, however, first class enters Eretz Yisrael before economy class.

“But it’s only a difference of a thousandth of a second!” someone pointed out.

Rav Avigdor’s response was emphatic: “Do you know how much Moshe Rabbeinu was willing to give just to be in Eretz Yisrael for a thousandth of a second?”

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**THE ANSWER**

Regarding last week's question about the paratrooper, Rav Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama Page 217) answered that with regard to the adult, the paratrooper would not be obligated because the adult chose to put themselves in a situation of potential risk. However, the paratrooper would be obligated for the damages to the child and to the car because they didn't have the ability to make that choice.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in honor of my wonderful husband  
**Rabbi Reuven Chapman**  
Love Janine



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

