

## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



### THE TORAH THEFT

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

There was a shul in Eretz Yisrael where everyone took the davening very seriously. One Rosh Hashana, it was time for Shmoneh Esrei, and every single person in the shul was davening with a great deal of kavanah. Suddenly, a Jewish man walked in, went up to the Aron Kodesh, took out two Torah scrolls, and began to walk outside with them.

One person in the shul noticed what was happening and realized that this man was brazenly stealing the two Torah scrolls and was about to leave with them.



### THE EINSTEIN LECTURE

Our Parsha opens with HaShem instructing Moshe to 'set' before the people the following compendium of laws. The word 'set' is used in the context of presenting a comprehensive ready-to-use arrangement. One example would be the setting of a table for dinner where every seat has a plate in front of it. Every plate has a napkin with silverware laid on it. A cup is placed in front of every plate and the serving dishes are on the center of the table and so on. The implication of this word in the context of our verse is that Moshe was instructed to present the 53 laws of this week's Parsha to his people with a clarity and understanding like a set dinner table. The difficulty is that the entire set of 53 mitzvos are expressed in just 87 verses. Naturally these 53 laws are merely touched on; the details of each law are omitted. How are we to understand when HaShem states Moshe to set before the following laws if there is not enough explanation to set before them? Rav Hirsch explains that this is a clear indication that there was an Oral Law that was given to Moshe alongside the Written Law. He highlights this point as this is the first transmission of law following the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Using the following story we can appreciate how Rav Hirsch explains the relationship between Torah she'bichsav (the Five Books of Moshe) and Torah she'baal peh, the Oral law.

In 1995, it had already been forty years since his passing when Albert Einstein appeared to a great physicist in a dream telling him that he was granted permission to return to this world for one day; Tuesday, April 18th. He wished to give a ten hour lecture at APL (Applied Physics Lab) to share his thoughts on modern day physics. He had been giving much thought on many topics during the past many years and has new insights which he very much wanted to share with folks who are still in this

We know that one is not allowed to interrupt Shmoneh Esrei unless there is a situation involving danger. So the person wondered whether he was permitted to say something to the others, call the police, shout out “Gannav”, or contact someone to try to stop the thief from stealing the Torah scrolls.

On one hand, you could argue: How could they remain passive while a Torah scroll, something so holy and very expensive, is being stolen? On the other hand, during Shmoneh Esrei we are not allowed to interrupt for anything unless there is a risk to life. In this case, it did not seem that there was any danger to life.

What do you think? Was he allowed to interrupt Shemoneh Esrei to prevent the Torah scrolls from being stolen?

See Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kama, p. 372.



world. This physicist contacted APL and discovered that the director of APL also had the same dream with Einstein visiting him with the same request. It was arranged and notices went out to all qualified physicists inviting them to this great event. Once it was arranged, these two dreamers once again were visited by Einstein who told them that there should be no recording devices of any sort in the lecture hall. If there were any, he would immediately leave.

April 18th arrived and as you can imagine the greatest physicists from around the world arrived at APL’s lecture hall. The security at the doors was doubled to insure that no cell phones along with any other devices did not enter the lecture hall. At exactly 9:00 Albert Einstein arrived and began a 10 hour non-stop lecture. Not once did he repeat himself. The amount of information that was transmitted could fill volumes. Every new concept that he introduced needed volumes of explanation to understand. The formulas and equations were innumerable.

Since no recording devices were allowed the organizers of the event hired the greatest stenographers to take notes to make sure that not a single point would be missed.

As you can imagine, although the notes that were taken were thorough and captured every point that Einstein made, nevertheless, anyone looking at those notes would not be able to understand them. There were many passages in the notes that were readable but there were so many markings and strange use of words in those notes which were employed to catch certain nuances which the stenographer understood but nobody else would be able to decipher.

Using this parallel, HaShem gave us the entirety of Torah, namely the Oral Torah, to Moshe. The Oral Law is truly beyond limits; there is no end. How could there be, it is the Wisdom of HaShem. All that Wisdom is carefully tucked into the words and letters of the Written Torah. Those who understand the principles of interpretation and have the guidance of HaShem are able to uncover those laws from the words of our Torah. This is the greatness of our Sages.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**





# SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

## THE WORLD'S LARGEST MIRROR: THE SCIENCE AND WONDER OF SALAR DE UYUNI

Imagine standing on a surface so white and expansive that you cannot tell where the earth ends and the sky begins. In every direction, the horizon disappears, leaving you suspended in a bright, blinding void. This isn't a scene from science fiction; it is the Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia. Located in the high Andes, this geological marvel is the world's largest salt flat. It covers over 10,000 square kilometers (roughly 4,000 square miles), an area roughly the size of the "Big Island" of Hawaii.

To understand why this massive white desert exists, we have to look back thousands of years. The salt flats were not always dry land. In olden times, this area was part of a giant ancient body of water known as Lake Minchin. Over thousands of years, the climate changed, and the water evaporated, leaving behind two smaller modern lakes, Lake Poopó and Lake Uru Uru, and two major salt deserts, the Salar de Coipasa and the massive Salar de Uyuni. The reason this salt didn't just wash away into the ocean is due to the region's geography. The Salar sits in the Altiplano basin, a high plateau at an altitude of about 3,650 meters (11,975 feet). This basin is "endorheic," which means it has no drainage outlet to the sea. Water from the surrounding mountains flows into the basin, collects there, and can only leave through evaporation.

When the water evaporates, it leaves behind everything that was dissolved in it. Over thousands of years, this process concentrated minerals into a thick crust. It is not just a dusting of salt on the ground; in the center of the flat, the crust of solid salt and gypsum can be over 10 meters (33 feet) thick.

One of the most striking features of the Salar de Uyuni is the geometric pattern on its surface. During the dry season (roughly April to November), the ground is a mosaic of hexagonal and pentagonal tiles that stretch on forever. For years, people assumed these were simply cracks caused by the surface drying out, similar to mud in a dried puddle. However, recent scientific research suggests a more complex process is at work.

Beneath the hard, white crust lies a layer of brine, water super-saturated with salt. In 2023, physicists discovered that the shapes are likely caused by "convection cells" in this groundwater. As the salty water evaporates, the remaining brine becomes denser and sinks. Less dense, slightly fresher water from below rises to replace it. This circulating movement of water underground pushes salt up at the edges of the cells, building the ridges that form the polygon shapes on the surface. These polygons are remarkably consistent, generally measuring a few meters across, creating a natural tiling effect that looks artificially constructed.

The Salar de Uyuni is widely considered the flattest place on Earth. It is like a giant level tool. Over the entire 4,000-square-mile area, the altitude varies by less than one meter. This extreme flatness makes the Salar invaluable for space exploration. Satellites orbiting the Earth need to calibrate their "altimeters", instruments that measure height. To do this, they need a target on Earth that is large, reflective, and perfectly flat. The ocean is too rough, and most land is too uneven. The Salar de Uyuni is the perfect reference point. NASA uses the salt flats to test the accuracy of GPS satellite positioning and to calibrate

Earth-observation satellites like ICESat and Envisat.

While the dry season offers geometric beauty, the rainy season (December to April) transforms the flats into a different world entirely. Because the salt crust is impermeable (water cannot soak through it easily) and the surface is perfectly flat, rain does not drain away. Instead, it sits on top, creating a thin layer of water just a few centimeters deep.

This shallow flood turns the salt flat into the world's largest mirror. The reflection is so perfect that the horizon line completely vanishes. This creates a phenomenon known as "sky-earth fusion," where walking on the ground feels like walking among the clouds. Without trees, buildings, or hills to provide scale, the human eye loses its ability to judge depth. Also, the high albedo (reflectivity) of the salt crust makes it one of the brightest surfaces on the planet, requiring visitors to wear sunglasses to avoid snow blindness.

The beauty of the Salar hides a massive economic treasure. The brine bubbling beneath the crust contains significantly more than just table salt (halite). It is rich in potassium, magnesium, and, most importantly, lithium.

Lithium is a critical component in the batteries that power smartphones, laptops, and electric vehicles. As the world shifts toward electric power, the demand for lithium has skyrocketed. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that Bolivia holds about 15% of the world's lithium resources. The European Space Agency cites estimates of around 9 million tonnes of lithium in the region. This potential has led some to call the Salar the "Saudi Arabia of Lithium."

At first glance, the Salar looks like a dead zone. The environment is harsh; the sun is intense due to the high altitude and reflective ground, and night-time temperatures can plummet to  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-4^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Yet, life finds a way. In the middle of this white ocean lies Isla Incahuasi, a rocky island that serves as a reminder of the area's aquatic past. (Pictured right) The island is covered in fossilized coral and giant *Trichocereus pasacana* cacti. These cacti are ancient survivors. They grow at an incredibly slow rate of about 1 centimeter per year. Since many of them stand up to 10 meters (33 feet) tall, the largest ones have been standing guard over the salt flats for roughly 1,000 years.

The region also hosts three species of pink flamingos: the Andean, Chilean, and James's flamingos. These birds thrive here, breeding in November and feeding on pink algae in the mineral-rich waters, which gives them their vibrant color.

Locals have also adapted to their environment in creative ways. With no trees for lumber, they look to the ground for building materials. They cut blocks of salt directly from the crust to build structures. The original "Palacio de Sal" (Palace of Salt) was the first hotel built entirely of salt, walls, floors, beds, and tables. While the original had to move due to sanitation issues, modern salt hotels (pictured second from left) continue this tradition, offering visitors a chance to sleep inside the very mineral they came to see.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!



## "THE MUTED REACTION "

A yungerman once called the Rosh Hayeshivah, Rav Yitzchak Hutner on the phone, joyously announcing the birth of a son, but there was absolutely no reaction from the Rosh Hayeshivah. Without even a trace of joy in his voice, and without any mazel tov wishes at all, he simply requested the yungerman to call back at a later time.

Wondering at the Rosh Hayeshivah's curious conduct, the talmid called back hoping for an explanation.

The Rosh Hayeshivah did indeed explain.

At the time of the first call he had another yungerman with him. That individual had not yet been blessed with children, and that very fact was actually the subject of their discussion. Upon receiving the initial call, the Rosh Hayeshivah immediately calculated that a joyous reaction at that particular moment, and a booming mazel tov wish on his part, would likely pain the yungerman who was with him, and he therefore did not react to the news.

From The Zichronos Of Rebbetzin Bruria David, published by the Gur Aryeh Institute For Advanced Jewish Scholarship



### THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the sparks that burned the awning, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama Page 360) answered that the installer, the worker who caused the fire, is liable to pay for the damage. Even though the person on the top floor had a mitzvah to make a ma'akeh, that did not give the installer the right to be negligent and burn another person's property.

This week's TableTalk is sponsored with much gratitude to HaShem in honor of the birth of our grandson  
**Yohanan Lavi Loeb**  
born Shabbos January 16, 2026

By his proud grandparents Miriam and Yitzchok Vurgaftman



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