

Chapter 17: The Bullfrog

Chapter 17: The Bullfrog delves into the challenges faced by the Ahavat Achim congregation in Pottstown, especially in the wake of Chona's hospitalization. The temple, a historical structure built by Chona's father, begins to unravel with the arrival of new Hungarian members, one of whom, Mr. Hudson, discovers a giant bullfrog in the mikvah. Infuriated, he promises a significant donation for the construction of a new mikvah, demanding that it be twice the size of the original and made of Carrara marble. Despite the temple's severe financial constraints, this request highlights the discord between the temple's ideals and its practical realities. The influx of new members creates additional stress on the temple's already strained resources, causing friction between the old and new congregants.

A meeting is held to discuss these mounting concerns, and Rabbi Karl Feldman struggles to maintain order amidst the escalating chaos. As the discussions unfold, it becomes evident that water issues are complicating the creation of the new mikvah. Rabbi Feldman reluctantly admits that the temple has been forced to use water from a well, as the town has never provided a proper water supply to the site. This disclosure adds depth to the community's internal dynamics, as it connects directly to Chona's prior disputes with Mr. Plitzka, a local farmer, and further complicates relationships with town authorities. The congregation's financial struggles and the lack of basic resources create a tense atmosphere, with some members feeling frustrated by the lack of progress while others argue over the best course of action.

Tensions rise as congregants, especially Mr. Hudson and Irv Skrupskelis, clash over the management of the temple's resources and the health concerns surrounding Chona. Their disputes touch on the larger issues of faith, community responsibilities, and the practical realities of maintaining a place of worship. As frustrations grow, Hudson calls for modernization and a reevaluation of the temple's role in the community,

advocating for changes that could bring the institution into alignment with contemporary needs and expectations. This request reflects a broader desire for progress in the face of the temple's longstanding issues and its inability to adapt to modern demands. While these personal and community conflicts unfold, the dialogue also highlights the ongoing struggle to reconcile the temple's past with its future.

The chapter is a reflection of the resilience and interconnectedness of the characters as they grapple with the various challenges that face them. The unexpected discovery of the bullfrog symbolizes larger, often hidden problems that can disrupt even the most established institutions. As the characters navigate these communal struggles, the story delves into themes of identity, faith, and the complexities of maintaining community ties in a rapidly changing world. The bullfrog, seemingly a trivial annoyance, becomes a catalyst for addressing deeper issues within the congregation, including the temple's outdated infrastructure and strained resources. Ultimately, the chapter speaks to the tensions between tradition and progress, highlighting the difficulty of preserving cultural and religious practices while also adapting to the evolving needs of the community.

The narrative also touches on the broader implications of faith and community dynamics, showing how the temple, as both a spiritual and social institution, is influenced by external pressures and internal conflicts. The ongoing battle for control over resources, such as water and finances, reflects the town's larger struggles with identity and survival. While the characters strive to maintain their faith and traditions, they must also face the realities of their circumstances, including the limitations of their physical space and the evolving demands of their members. The chapter provides a poignant look at the complexities of faith, community, and progress, underscoring how even the smallest of disruptions, like a bullfrog, can prompt deeper reflections on the direction of an institution and its role in the lives of its members.