

What Should I Do with an Aveidah That No One Claims?

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Question: I found an item and put up signs, but no one came forward to claim it. It has been in my possession for a long time. What am I supposed to do with it?

Answer: If you prefer, you can put it away in a box in your attic and have it stay there until Eliyahu Hanavi comes.

However, if you don't want to do that, and the item is easily replaceable, you can estimate the value of the item and take it for yourself. If the owner ever turns up, you can give him the money or buy him a replacement.

Surprisingly, the Gemara uses tefillin, which was easy to purchase in those days, as an example of a "replaceable item". For us, it would seem that this would apply to almost anything besides tefillin. Most people today would want their own tefillin returned, rather than a replacement pair. Almost all other items, however, can easily be replaced. Therefore, most items can be taken for oneself, with the value recorded to be returned to the owner when he is found.

It is advisable to keep a list of items that one found, with the details of the value of the item and the relevant *simanim*. I've seen some advise that a good place to keep this list is in the back of one's Bava Metziah Gemara. Keeping such a list is usually more convenient than keeping a box full of found items.