

What Should You do with a Package Received That is not Yours?

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Case: A person received a package delivered to his house. He had not ordered any package, nor did he expect to receive such a package from anyone. When he looked at the identifying label, he saw that it was supposed to be delivered to his next-door neighbor.

Question: What should he do with the package?

Answer: One aspect of this question relates to at what point the neighbor would have acquired the package halachically. However, the issue is complex, as it involves determining the type of *kinyan* at play in online transactions, as well as issues of *bereirah* (there was no defined object yet at the time of payment, so perhaps the *kinyan* has not yet taken place). For the sake of simplicity, we will assume that a valid *kinyan* has already occurred and the package belongs to the neighbor who ordered it.

The second aspect of the question relates to the mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah*. If the neighbor is a *Yehudi*, then the person who received it should certainly bring it to him, in order to fulfill the mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah*. It is important to note in this context that it is best that the intention not be about returning the object just from a moral standpoint, or “to be a good neighbor”. Rather, one should return lost objects with the express intent to perform the mitzvah of *hashavas aveida* (see Sanhedrin 76b) .

If one’s neighbor is not a *Yehudi*, then the mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah* does not apply. Nevertheless, the element of *kiddush Hashem* should be taken into account, and tremendous value exists in returning lost objects for this reason. This is evident from the Talmud Yerushalmi’s description (Bava Metzia 2:1) of the story of Shimon ben Shetach, who returned a precious pearl found on his newly purchased donkey to its previous owner who was an *Eino Yehudi*, thereby creating a great *kiddush Hashem* (see also Shulchan Aruch, C.M. 266:1). [EO3]

In addition, the considerations of *eivah*, *darkei shalom*, and potential *chilul Hashem* must also be taken into account in such cases. We see many Gemaras that talk about *darkei shalom*. For example, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai always greeted everyone, including non-Jews, before they greeted him.

Returning lost objects to others around us can raise our reputation as Jews in their eyes. It thus has great value and is ultimately considered a tremendous mitzvah.