

17. The Bullfrog

The chapter "The Bullfrog" delves into a tumultuous time for the Ahavat Achim congregation in Pottstown, with Chona's hospitalization occurring amidst the congregation's struggle with their mikvah challenges. The temple, founded by Chona's father on Chicken Hill, faces upheaval with the arrival of new Hungarian members and an unexpected guest—a giant bullfrog found in the mikvah. This peculiar incident draws the attention of Mr. Hudson (Junow Farnok), a new congregant from Buffalo who demands a larger, more luxurious mikvah, offering a generous donation towards it.

The temple's financial situation, previously bolstered by quirky donations, now depends on addressing the mikvah's water source—a dilemma highlighted during a chevry meeting attended by key congregants, including Rabbi Feldman, Irv Skrupskelis, and Mr. Hudson. Discussion reveals that the temple has been clandestinely using water from a nearby dairy's well, a solution complicated by ownership changes and historical grievances with the local Plitzka family. These challenges are intertwined with personal stories of love, migration, and community solidarity, painting a vivid picture of the congregation's social and logistical intricacies.

Mr. Hudson's attempts to rationalize the mikvah's water issue are met with layers of local history, bureaucracy, and resentment, making a straightforward resolution elusive. The narrative weaves through past interpersonal dynamics, touching on Chona's activism and the community's reliance on improvised solutions for their water needs. As the discussion shifts from water logistics to Chona's worsening condition and the broader implications for the congregation, tensions flare, revealing deeper divides within the community.

Rabbi Feldman's hesitations, Irv's protective stance, and Mr. Hudson's frustrations culminate in a heated debate that encapsulates the chapter's core themes—community resilience, the complexity of belonging, and the challenges of balancing tradition with modern demands. The mikvah, and the bullfrog found within it, symbolizes the congregation's struggle to maintain purity and sanctity amidst practical and existential challenges, underscoring the nuanced interplay between faith, identity, and survival in an evolving societal landscape.