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The Mother of the Father of Yeshivos

By Avraham Erlanger

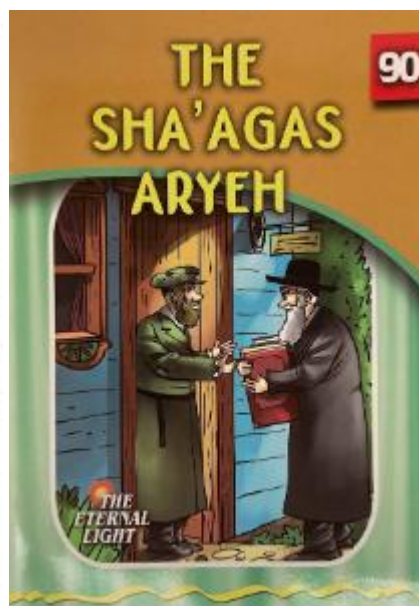
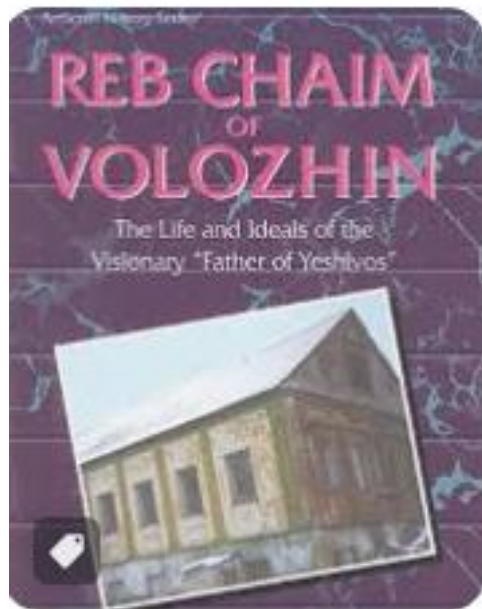


Illustration of the Volozhiner Yeshiva

The mother of R' Chaim Volozhiner, founder of the great Volozhiner Yeshiva, and prime talmid of the Vilna Gaon, was a remarkable woman. She provided the Rav of her town, the Shaagas Aryeh, with a fine set of Talmud Bavli. He gave her a brocha, saying that she would give birth to two additional sons, one of whom would

disseminate Gemara throughout the world, and the other of whom would not require a Gemara as he would have it all committed to memory.

The first son was R' Chaim, and the second was R' Zalman Volozhiner, who never forgot a word he learned. When she was about to give birth to R' Chaim, the Shaagas Aryeh was in her home. In order not to disturb the Rav's study, she suffered her pains in silence.



When the Rav heard a son had been born, he gave her a brocha that the child would rise to greatness until the voice of his Torah would be heard in the streets. Some say that she had asked the Shaagas Aryeh to be present in the home so that the very first sounds her baby would hear in this world would be sounds of Torah.

R' Chaim himself extols his mother's modesty, and tells of her years of toil and struggle to instruct her sons in Torah and mitzvos. His parents hired outstanding teachers for their sons. When the eldest son, R' Simcha, completed all six sections of the Mishnah and knew them by heart, his parents held a festive party to help him appreciate his learning.

His younger brother, Zalman, inspired by the excitement was jealous and vowed that he would do the same thing – and would begin at once. Zalman was then only 4 years old!

This remarkable woman had five sons – each one a great talmid chochom. Apart from the more renowned R' Chaim and R' Zalman, there were R' Simcha, R' Nachman and R' Yosef, who served as Rabbonim and Rebbeim throughout Lithuania and Poland. (Excerpted from the ArtScroll book – “She Shall Be Praised”)

Reprinted from the Parshas Re'eh email of The Weekly Vort.

Toras Avigdor Junior

Story by Nisson and Levi Krupenia

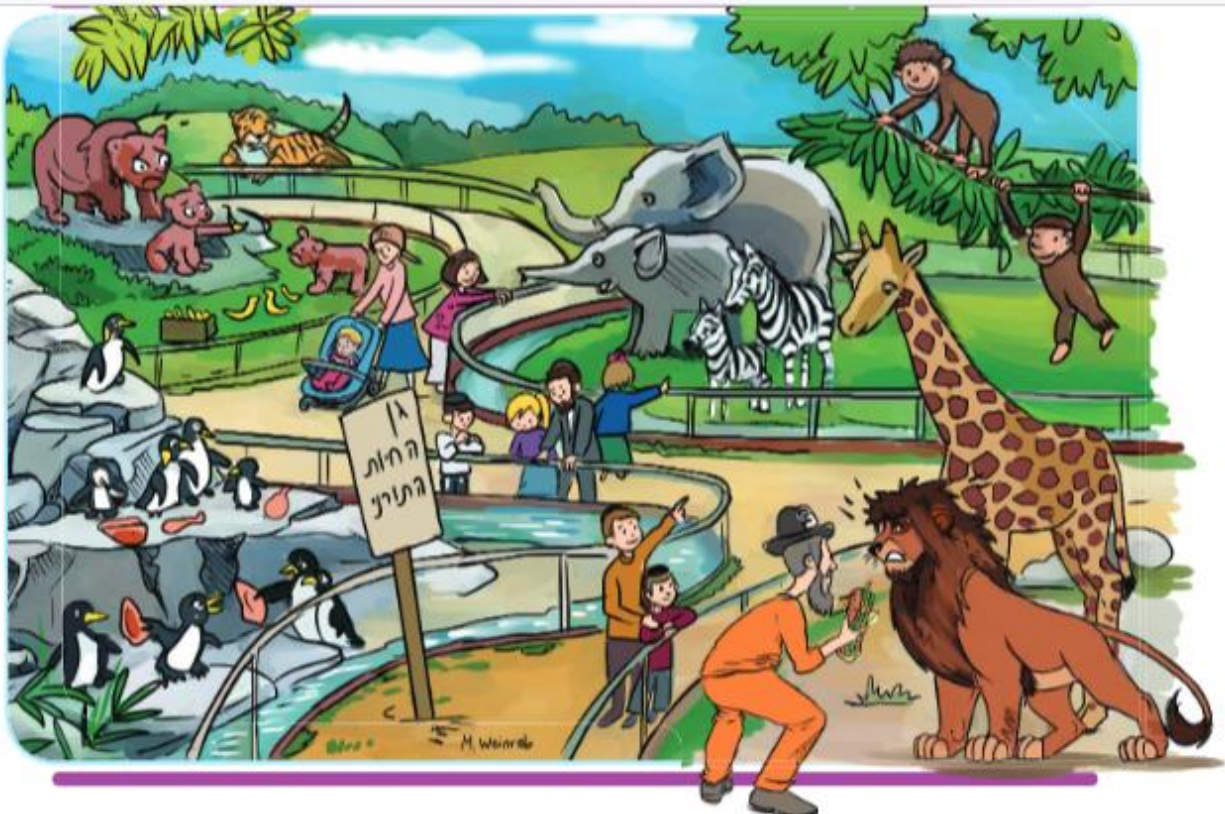


Illustration by Miri Weinreb

Summer, 2023

The Weiss family decided to go to the zoo in honor of Levi finishing learning Masichta Sanhedrin. As they got close to the zoo, they heard the lions roaring very loudly, the donkeys braying wildly, and the cows mooing sadly. Then they saw the reason for all the chaos. Inside the lion's cage were bales of hay! And the donkeys had large chunks of meat to eat! And the bears' cage had hot peppers and pickles inside, for the bears to have for lunch!

Little Hadassa asked, "Who gave the bears that food?!" The rest of the family was wondering the same thing.

Then Nisson remarked, "Hey! Since when is Tzakok a zookeeper?"

They all saw Tzadok feeding the elephants some dead, squished cockroaches. Now the family realized why all the animals had their food mixed up...

Suddenly, a worried looking Tzadok came running over to the family and cried out: “I can’t figure out what I did wrong! So, what if I gave the horse a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and the giraffe a tuna patty. What’s so bad?!”

Every Creature Has its Own Menu

Tatty answered Tzadok, “Rabbi Avigdor Miller, ZT”L used to teach a very big lesson about food. He would say that Hashem gives worms to fish to eat. But you don’t like worms, so Hashem gives you bread to eat. Everybody gets what he likes. וְכָל־בְּיֶעֱזָם. Each creature has its own menu.

There are hundreds of thousands of different customers and hundreds of thousands of menus!

“Think about it - Why did Hashem make it like this? For what purpose? The answer is this: Yes, of course everybody could say that this world is a world of chessed. It’s easy to say that. But to actually FEEL that this is a world of chessed, and more chessed, and more chessed, we get that feeling from the experience of eating. When we see the HUGE variety of food Hashem made, we are supposed to think: This food is so good, thank you so much Hashem, I love you, Hashem!”

Rav Volender’s Parshah Shiur

Tzadok started to jump up and down. “Yes, this week I just heard that from Rav Volender in his parshah shiur. It says in Parshas Re’eh, הַלֵּל לַפְנֵי ה' מְאֹד... כְּלֻף, It’s so much fun to eat, it’s delicious, it’s nutritious! All types of flavors for all types of tastes! Thank You, Hashem!”

He then said out loud, “I gotta run fix my mistakes now...”

“Wow, all this talk about food is making me hungry,” said Chani. As Mommy took out the food, Tatty announced “Let’s thank Hashem for all the options of spreads you can put into a sandwich.” The kids all gave ideas. Peanut butter, jelly, cream-cheese, butter, lox, white fish, dill dip, hot sauce, matbucha, egg-plant, egg salad, tuna, guacamole, sliced cheese, chumus techina...”

Tzadok came running over to the family and said breathlessly, “The food here smells so good. I think I’ll make myself an ultra-sandwich, including all the spreads at once! This way I don’t think I’ll ever forget the lesson we learned today!” And so, it was.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos!

Takeaway:

When we eat all different types of yummy delicious foods, we think of the Goodness of Hashem. And every time we eat, we feel it more and more and more.

Reprinted from the Parshas Re’eh 5783 edition of Toras Avigdor Junior based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt”l.

The Worst Shabbat – A Story of the Baal Shem Tov

By Racheli Reckles



The host despised Chassidim; he cursed at the Baal Shem Tov and his students. He ran through Kiddush then threw a few morsels of dry black bread in their direction...

Rav Shalom Arush has opened my eyes and the eyes of many others to an amazing, profound, yet simple spiritual law: when we go through a difficult time, we should always be thankful because we could/should have gotten worse.

No matter how painful, we should know in our hearts that Hashem has tempered strict judgment with mercy. To be honest, I can't think of a better way to survive and potentially blossom as a result of dealing with such impossible challenges that people go through these days.

There seems to be a whole 'lot of judgment goin' on, and it looks pretty cruel and merciless, to be honest. I hope this story about the Baal Shem Tov will help us see that no matter how bad things appear, they could be much, much worse.

One day, the Baal Shem Tov (BESHT) and three of his disciples decided to travel to a distant city. If you've heard of the BESHT's horses, you would know they weren't ordinary horses. Alexei, the BESHT's carriage driver, would let go of the reins and the horses would gallop at incredibly high speed while barely (or not even) touching the ground, to a destination that only they and the BESHT knew. In a few hours the horses traveled distances that would normally have taken several days.

Lost and Wandering Through an Unfamiliar Forest

On this particular journey, however, the horses seemed to have lost their way. Not only that, the BESHT lost his superhuman powers of perception and divine inspiration. They found themselves wandering through an unfamiliar forest, whose trees were so dense that they couldn't tell if it was day or night. They wandered like this for some time until they reached a lone cabin in a clearing.

They were confident that the owner of the cabin would be understanding and allow them to rest over Shabbat, as it turned out that it was Friday afternoon. To their shock, they quickly discovered that their host despised them and all things Chassidic. Furthermore, this man was crude, rude, and lived in deplorable conditions. The Chassidim didn't know how they were going to get through this Shabbat.

The host gave them certain ground rules if they insisted on staying: no talking, no long prayers, no questioning the kosher status of the food or asking for anything that might make their stay a bit more comfortable. They were to be completely obedient and quiet, otherwise they would quickly find themselves in the great outdoors for the remainder of Shabbat.

Mumbled Through the Friday Night Service

As the sun began to set, they noticed that the man didn't do any special Shabbat preparations. He slammed a single candle into a lump of clay in the middle of the makeshift table, quickly mumbled the Friday night service without giving his guests a chance to participate, and ran through Kiddush faster than a Ferrari can run a red light.

When it came time to do *hamotzi*, he threw slices of coarse pumpernickel bread at the Chassidim, and cursed them repeatedly when they asked for whole rolls. The curses, yelling, and insults continued all throughout Shabbat. Meanwhile, the BESHT still hadn't regained his powers of perception, so he was clueless as to the reason Hashem put them in such a mess.

Requests for something to make their sleeping conditions more comfortable were answered with vile curses and insults. Eventually, the host threw a woman's

garment for the BESHT to use as a pillow, and *shaatnez* (forbidden mixture of wool and linen) for his Chassidim to use.

The Guests Were Deprived of a Decent Meal

The horrible night was followed by an even more unbearable day. The unfortunate visitors were bombarded by curses, yelling, and insults throughout the entire day. They were starving, as their host had not offered them a decent meal. They did their best to remain quiet for the remainder of Shabbat, and yearned for the moment they could escape.

As Shabbat came to a close, the iron-fisted host suddenly refused to let them leave. At his “insistence,” they were obliged to stay for another two days. Finally, after three days of no food and little sleep, they begged their host to release them.

Before the man could answer, a young, sweet-faced woman stepped out of a room and smiled at them. The Chassidim could barely keep their knees from buckling at such a shockingly unexpected sight. “What are you doing here??” they could barely stammer.

Decreed that the BESHT Lose His Portion in the World to Come

Walking over to the BESHT, she said, “I’m Sarah, the young orphan who worked in your home. When you and your wife took me in, I was covered in lice and sores. The Rebbetzin used to comb me and scrub me every Friday afternoon, and I would cry out in pain. One Friday, the pain was unbearable, and I must have screamed out louder than usual. Your wife gave me a slap across the face, and you saw the whole incident and did nothing to help me. As a result, there was a Heavenly decree that you should lose your portion in the World to Come.

When I married this man, who is a hidden tzaddik, the sentence was revealed to us. It disturbed us greatly, and we searched for a way to overturn it. Through our many prayers we succeeded in reducing your original sentence to a lighter one: losing the pleasure of one Shabbat, which is a taste of the World to Come. Now, thank G-d, after having suffered the past several days, your portion is complete.”

It is my sincere hope that we can all internalize this amazing concept, so that we can go through all of our most painful moments with a smile on our faces and the knowledge that, even though we may suffer now, we will have an eternity of happiness very soon. Amen.

Reprinted from the website of Breslov Magazine.

The Rebbe's Young Translator

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

Editor@ascentofsafed.com



The Lubavitcher Rebbe

It was in the first week of Menachem Av 5733 (Aug. 1973) . I [Rabbi Pinchas Baumgarten] was then a yeshiva student from Argentina learning in 770. [1] One day, I was startled by Rabbi Binyamin Klein, one of the secretaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson) at the time, who summoned me to come to the secretariat office across the hall from the Rebbe's room. I had no idea why, but of course I rushed over.

There I found three people waiting, who I later learned were brothers. They were frantically speaking to the secretary in Spanish.

"*Por favor*, please, let us see him!" one of them begged. "I don't have much time, the doctor said."

"He is very sick," another added.

Rabbi Klein stared at me for help. He couldn't understand them, while of course I knew Spanish because of my many years in Argentina when my father, Berel, served as the head *shaliach*, emissary of the Rebbe for that country.

After a brief conversation with Rabbi Klein, I turned to the men and translated apologetically in Spanish, that the Rebbe is not meeting with anyone at this time, during the Nine Days, (the days of mourning from *Rosh Chodesh Menachem-Av* through *Tisha b'Av* for the Holy Temple in Jerusalem).

The men sagged in dejection. I tried to distract them by asking where they were staying. They answered that they had taken rooms at a certain expensive hotel, and had even brought along their doctor from Argentina.

Rabbi Klein Gave the Nearest Appointment

After I explained to them the protocol, they understood they had to wait a few days until after Tisha B'Av. Rabbi Klein, understanding the urgency, gave them the nearest appointment.

In the interim, I met with them and we even *farbrenge*d (sat together and discussed Torah concepts). Before their planned day of *yeichidus* (private audience with the Rebbe), I suggested, The Rebbe's blessings are more powerful if you commit to fulfill some mitzvah. Maybe you can choose one that you would be willing to do on a regular basis.

The men spoke among themselves and finally nodded in agreement. That same day they had me take them to purchase three pairs of *tefillin*. Every morning, I went to their hotel to help them to put them on.

* * *

On the day of their *yeichidus*, I wrote to the Rebbe all the details I had gleaned about these gentlemen. The sick man, his wife, and his two brothers arrived at 770, where I was waiting to go in with them, at the secretary's request, to translate. Reverently, I entered the room and stood on the side of the room to the left of the Rebbe.

Asks Them to Commit to the Mitzvah of Keeping Kosher

The Rebbe invited them to sit. After reading the letter that I wrote, the Rebbe said, "If you wish for your brother's recovery, you must commit to keeping kosher.

I translated it, but apparently not properly. The Rebbe corrected my Spanish [!], saying, "That is not what I meant." I tried again, and the Rebbe nodded his satisfaction.

The Rebbe then turned to the sick man. "Please show me where your disease is located."

The man, who had skin cancer, rose and pointed to the area. The Rebbe put on his glasses to look closer. After a glance, he said to me, "*Pinye*, [2] tell him I see nothing."

Then, he showered them with blessings. When he finished, he asked to see the exact same spot again.

Again, he put on his glasses, stared for a moment, and insisted, “Tell him I see nothing.”

The group rose to leave, but I couldn’t move. I was stunned by what I had witnessed. Even after they left the room, I remained stuck in my place so that another secretary of the Rebbe, Rabbi Leibel Groner, *a”h*, literally had to pull me out.

The Doctors Were Amazed by The Disappearance of the Growth

The next day, the man and his wife went to the hospital. To the amazement of the doctors, the growth had disappeared. Naturally the couple was ecstatic; from that day they were scrupulous about keeping kosher. From New York they went to Miami, where they also kept strict *kashrut*.

* * *

Several months later, in Kislev 5734/1973, [3] I got married. This couple, who was quite close to my father, were invited to the wedding, but they didn’t come. Disappointed, I asked my father why they were absent, but my father didn’t answer.

When I asked him again the next day, he explained hesitantly. “They went on vacation to Punta del Este.” [4]

The Man Died a Week Later

My father sighed. “Unfortunately, they became less careful about *kashrut*. Within a short time after, the cancer returned. The man died a week later.”

Hearing this, I went to console the family, who happened to be still sitting *shiva*, the seven-day mourning period.

At the entrance to their residence I saw, seated on the steps, one of the brothers whom I had met previously in New York. Before I could say a word, he said to me sorrowfully, “See what happens when you don’t listen to what the Rebbe says.”

[1] Lubavitch International Headquarters / 770 Eastern Parkway / Brooklyn, New York

[2] A common Yiddish nickname/diminitive for Pinchas.

[3] (Same month as I did y.t.)

[4] A popular seaside resort town in Uruguay

Reprinted from the Parshat Re’eh 5783 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.

Who Gets the Credit?

By Rabbi Yechiel Spero

Yoram Eliav, a popular fifteen-year-old, did what all normal irreligious teens do. That is, until his family became more and more interested in learning about Torah, Shabbos, and Hashem, and Yoram came along happily.

Tragically, just as he and his family were getting their bearings in Yiddishkeit, Yoram was hit by a car and killed. Three thousand people showed up to his funeral. His family spoke about his sweetness and the purity of his soul. And instead of turning their anger toward the Al-mighty, they did the opposite.

Knowing how much Yoram loved Torah and Yiddishkeit, they began to host classes for young men and women in their home in his memory. One day, they invited Rav Aryeh Schechter, talmid of the Chazon Ish and the Brisker Rav, who was also a featured lecturer for Arachim and other outreach organizations, to inspire the gathering.

About 200 teenagers showed up. Rav Aryeh was supposed to speak for a half-hour, but the audience encouraged him to continue. He continued for another half-hour, and when he saw they were still thirsty for more, he spoke for yet another half-hour.

Notebook with Stunning Compilation of Inspiring Songs

At the lecture's end, Yoram's friends showed Rav Aryeh a notebook, a stunning compilation of nine songs written by Yoram two months before he died. Rav Aryeh flipped through the notebook and was amazed at what he saw. The songs were thoughtful and deep. But one song stuck out.

"When we were younger, we would think. But when we got older, they gave us toys so we would stop thinking. But I was not convinced. I continued to think. Chashviti ve'chashviti, chashviti ve'chashviti — I thought and I thought, I thought and I thought, until I reached a conclusion. It was worthwhile for me to come to This World to reveal Who created it."

Rav Aryeh could not believe what he was reading. A fifteen-year-old with such an exalted soul! And now, thanks to Yoram's yearning and longing, all of these teenagers had just spent an hour and a half listening to a Torah lecture from Rav Aryeh. Who knew how far it would lead?

Years later, Rav Aryeh was invited to give a series of classes in Rechasim on the topic of faith, based on the Chazon Ish's sefer, Emunah U'Bitachon. In the course of his speech, he told the story of Yoram and the magnificent songs he wrote. He even repeated the song "Chashviti," which he had memorized long ago.

After the class, two men came over to him and asked if he remembered them. He looked at them and tried to recall when and where he had met them, but he could not.

“We came to the class you gave after Yoram died.”

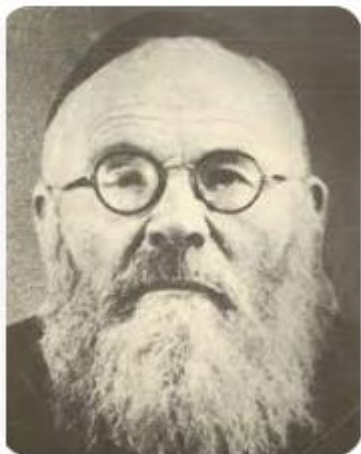
Rav Aryeh still did not recognize them — because they looked quite different. Back then, they were irreligious teenagers. Now, they were yungeleit! Then they added, “You will never believe what happened. Just about all 200 teenagers who came to that lecture became baalei teshuvah and are raising beautiful, Torah’dike families.”

Rav Aryeh contemplated, “Who is the one responsible for all of them returning to their roots? It all goes back to one teenage boy who decided to make a cheshbon hanefesh. Yoram gets the credit.”

TAKEAWAY: We can all grow, as long as we stop for one moment and think. Who knows how far it will take — not just us, but others who will be swept along as well?

*Reprinted from the Parshas Re’eh 5783 edition of At the Artscroll Shabbos Table.
Excerpted from the Artscroll book – “The Eternal Wisdom of Pirkei Avos.”*

The Distinguished Rabbi’s Request



Rabbi Elya Lopian

A GROUP OF POLICEMEN
were on a train heading to Haifa from

Yerushalayim. In the middle of the train ride, one of the policemen felt a light tap on his shoulder.

He turned around and saw an obviously distinguished Yid. It was R’ Elya Lopian. R’ Elya Lopian asked the policeman if he could gather together all of the policemen on the train so they could answer “Amen” to his ברכה of אשר יצר.

Although the policeman had no idea what this was all about, or the concept of ברכות and answering אמן, he immediately got up and got all of the officers together. As they gathered

around, some of them were nudging each other, curious as to what would happen. R' Elya stood, surrounded by the officers, and began reciting the ברכה slowly, each word clearly precious. As R' Elya Lopian made the ברכה the officers' hardened hearts softened and were filled with admiration and respect for the Yiras Shomayim of Rav Elya Lopian.

R' Elya finished the ברכה and a mighty "אמן" burst out from the mouths of the policemen. One officer said to his friend that it was possible to become a בעל תשובה from that one ברכה.

A short while later the train abruptly stopped. No one knew what was happening and the air was filled with fear. After about half an hour the train continued to travel and they then heard the reason for the delay. A terrorist had laid explosives on the line with the intention of blowing up the train. Miraculously the bomb did not explode and they were all saved.

It says in Tosfos that when one says the word "Amen" one should have in mind that Hashem is "Kel Melech N'eman".

Reprinted from the Parshas Eikev 5783 edition of Eitz Hachaim

Not Everything that Goes Wrong is Truly Wrong

There are Hatzalah volunteers in every area of the Catskills, and when there is a medical emergency, a dispatcher will call on the volunteers closest to the scene and ask them to respond. Last summer, a dispatcher erred and called Hatzalah members from a different location.

Two volunteers were closer to the site of the emergency, but for some reason, the dispatcher sent the members who were twenty minutes away. Baruch Hashem, despite his error, the person in need was treated in time, and nothing serious happened.

Nevertheless, when the dispatcher realized his mistake, his conscious rebuked him harshly. He realized that this time he was lucky, and no one was hurt, but it could have ended differently, r'l.

The two Hatzalah members who were closer to the emergency heard the call on their radio and felt betrayed. "We are closer to the scene; why didn't the dispatcher call us? Does he think we aren't capable and professional?"

So, three people were disappointed. The dispatcher was upset that he made this error, and the yungerleit felt slighted and disrespected, but it was for everyone's good, as we will see.

This is what occurred: The two yungerleit figured that if they weren't called, for whatever reason, they don't have to go to the emergency. So, instead, they went to the

beis medresh. Suddenly, a woman entered the beis medresh with an infant in her hands, shouting that her child had stopped breathing.

The two yungerleit worked on the infant child for a long time, and b”H saved his life. Now it was understood why it was arranged from heaven that they be in the beis medresh (and not at the other call). The other emergency could wait twenty minutes, but every moment is critical when an infant stops breathing. The lesson is that when you think something went wrong, it isn't so. Hashem plans and arranges everything precisely as it should be.

Reprinted from the Parshas Eikev 5783 email of Torah Wellsprings: The Collected Thoughts of Rabbi Elimelech Biderman.

The Devastating House Robbery?

Reb Menachem and his wife live in Bnei Brak and were away one Shabbos. That Shabbos, their home was robbed. Among the stolen items were checks Reb Menachem received from his customers, jewelry their daughter received as a gift for her upcoming chasunah, and a hundred-thousand-shekel, money Reb Menachem had just borrowed to pay for the wedding!

On Motzei Shabbos, one of the children had to get something from his parent's home, and he was the first one to see what occurred. He called his father to tell him what happened. (He thought it would be easier for his parents to know beforehand rather than come home and find everything turned topsy-turvy.)

Reb Menachem immediately parked his car at the side of the road and covered his face with his hands. He couldn't drive; he was too distressed. Eventually, he calmed down, and they arrived home. His wife entered the house and said, "Ribono shel Olam! I believe everything is from You, and everything is for the good, although we don't understand why. In the merit of my emunah, I request that my two children beget children of their own."

Two of their married children didn't yet have children. One was nine years after the chasunah, and the other was six years after the chasunah. She added, "Furthermore, Ribono Shel Olam. In the merit of our belief that even this is for the good, may our divorced son find his shidduch..."

Her tefillos were answered. It didn't take a year, and her two children had children of their own, and her divorced son was engaged and married. We learn from this story that when one keeps this mitzvah and believes that everything is for the good, he is rewarded immensely.

Reprinted from the Parshas Eikev 5783 email of Torah Wellsprings: The Collected Thoughts of Rabbi Elimelech Biderman.