

Good Shabbos Everyone. This Shabbos is the last Shabbos of the year as Rosh Hashana is next week. The new year Rosh Hashana is a time of renewal, of new beginnings. In preparation for Rosh Hashana, we will begin on Motzei Shabbos to say Slichos - prayers aimed at opening our hearts to teshuva - repentance. The Sages tell us that one who repents has a fresh start on life. The following amazing true story will inspire us to make the necessary changes in life to ensure that we will have a good sweet year, with Hashem's help.

Hellen and Paul Nach (not their real names) underwent the most challenging of life's circumstances. Yet, through it all, they searched for meaning and the Divine hand guiding their lives. You see, Hellen and Paul were having trouble having a baby. They had been married for several years and they desperately wanted children. Yet, in spite of all their attempts, all of their most fervent prayers, they were unable to conceive. Ever since they married and moved to their cozy home in the suburbs, Paul dreamed of being father. As he made kiddush Friday nights, he envisioned a table crowded with noisy children who would sing songs, share words of Torah, and talk about their week. So, he wondered, why weren't they able to have their own child?

Perhaps Hashem wanted something else from them. But what? Weary of disappointment, they tried just about any treatment. The first treatment was unsuccessful. But the couple kept their faith, insisting that, "The next one will be the one." Six months later, they tried again. But that, too, did not work.

One night, as they prepared dinner together, Paul wondered aloud if they should pursue a different path. "Maybe Hashem doesn't want us to have children this way," he said gently, as his wife's eyes filled with tears. "Maybe we should adopt." Hellen was hesitant, she didn't want to give up hope. But she didn't want to let her husband down either. Maybe adopting was the answer, she agreed. She tried to warm up to the idea, and began researching the possibility.

One night, as Paul and Hellen were reading in the den, Hellen remarked that in China, thousands of baby girls are abandoned as couples attempt to have a boy. Paul's ears perked up. "That's terrible," he exclaimed. "More people ought to go to China and try to adopt them!"

Hellen agreed it would be a mitzvah to adopt one of the girls and have her converted to Judaism. The next day, they filed paperwork to begin adoption proceedings. But even as they sent in the papers to the adoption agency, a part of her couldn't give up on the idea of having her own child so she continued the treatments.

After the third treatment, they received shocking news. They were expecting twins. Their joy knew no bounds, and soon most of their friends and family knew of the good tidings. Hellen skimmed baby magazines; Paul began researching Jewish baby names. Despite her happiness, some uncomfortable questions began gnawing at Hellen. She asked herself, could she handle newborn twins and an adopted baby at the same time? Although she was excited, she was also nervous about the birth of her twins. She wanted to be the best mother she could be. But she kept thinking about the girl in China who was surely waiting for loving parents to rescue her. She told Paul about her doubts, and he agreed that three kids at once would be too difficult. With a heavy heart, she called the agency to discontinue the adoption process. And so they put the idea of an adoption to rest.

For a few months, Hellen reveled in her pregnancy. But then, four months into her pregnancy, tragedy struck. Hellen lost one of the babies. The couple was devastated. For Paul and Hellen, the celebration was marred by sadness. But thankfully, that March, they had a healthy baby girl, whom they named Miriam. Dozens of well-wishers from the community descended on their home with gifts and good wishes. Miriam was an easy baby who Paul and Hellen instantly adored. Paul never wanted to put her down, although Hellen teased him that he was spoiling her. Everyone was happy for them. But for Paul and Hellen, the celebration was marred by sadness because of the baby they had lost.

After a few months, Paul began thinking again about adoption. He wondered about the baby girls in China waiting for families. Hellen, too, was already contemplating another baby, and like Paul, she couldn't stop thinking about the Chinese girls in need of a family.

One morning, as Paul was leaving for work, she turned to him and said, "Maybe we lost the baby so that we know we should have two children, but one of them is a girl from China." Paul was stunned. What a coincidence, he told her. It was precisely what he had been thinking. They called back the adoption agency to commence the adoption process they had halted when they became pregnant. Most of the paperwork was already complete. They had spent many hours acquiring the necessary letters of recommendation, background checks and fingerprints.

According to the adoption agency, all they needed to do was visit a doctor to prove they were physically fit to be parents. Hellen's doctor appointment was routine. The doctor proclaimed her to be in excellent health and signed the papers, which were sent to the agency. Hellen breathed a sigh of relief.

Paul went for his physical a few days later. After some routine tests, the doctor signed off on the adoption papers and sent them in. "I noticed something on the x-raus that bothered me," he said. But then the doctor requested a battery of additional tests. Although most doctors never bother with such detailed tests, he explained to Paul, he is old-fashioned and detail oriented, and always requires them. Paul sighed and tried not to get impatient. The papers had already been sent in. Why should he bother with more tests?

But after his chest x-ray, the doctor called him back to discuss the results. "I noticed something on the films that bothered me," he said. "It's probably a clogged artery. You should have it looked at." He sent Paul for a CAT scan. The results shook him to the core: He had a rare form of cancer. The tumor was just large enough to be visible but in an early-enough stage to cure, the doctor told him.

"It's a complete miracle that you came now," the doctor told Paul. "Had you visited any earlier we never would have detected it, and a few months from now, it would have been too large to do anything."

Paul's head spun when he realized what he was hearing. He was 38 years old and a first-time father. He was about to adopt a child. And now he had a tumor? But the fact that he had arrived at the doctor's office at that precise time made recovery possible. Could it be that their decision to adopt had saved his life? When Paul told Hellen, tears welled up in her eyes. Suddenly, everything was clear to her. "This is why we went through what we did," she said in a choked voice. "It's because Hashem wanted you to see the doctor at the right time. Maybe that's why it took so long to get pregnant, why we lost a child, why we decided to adopt when we did – it was all to save your life."

Paul underwent chemotherapy and had the tumor removed. As he recovered, the adoption papers were processed. A photo arrived in the mail of a baby girl with giant chocolate brown eyes and black hair. Hellen and Boruch Hashem a cancer-free Paul stood in a nursery in a small city in China. Paul stared at the photo and began pondering Hebrew names aloud. Hellen's heart thumped wildly as she peered at the baby's face. Somehow, even thousands of miles away, she felt connected to the child. She knew she was meant to be her mother.

And then, several weeks later, Hellen stood in a nursery in a small city in China and beamed as they cradled their new baby girl. They brought in the Jewish New Year with Chabad of Guangzhou. It was there that Paul and Hellen ushered in another beginning with their second child, whom they decided to name Anya, meaning "Hashem answered me." Paul and Hellen had saved Anya, giving her a second chance by taking her into their lives and raising her as a Jew. And she, in turn, saved her father's life and answered her parents' most fervent prayers.

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