

**Good Shabbos Everyone.** In this week's portion Vayigash tells us about the emotional reunion between Yosef and his brothers.

During his opening remarks to his brothers, Yosef refers to the divine intervention which brought about the unusual set of circumstances of the reunion, namely, that Yakov's sons had come to Egypt to ask for food from their long-last brother whom they had sold into slavery many years earlier.

The verse quotes Yosef as saying, "Thus Hashem has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance." (Bereishis 45:7) We see from here Yosef's recognition of the concept of Hashgacha Pratis – divine intervention, which is one of the foundations of Jewish belief. As the Rambam teaches us in the first of his 13 Principles of Faith: "I believe in perfect faith that the Creator blessed is His Name, is the Creator and the Guider of all creations..."

Believing in Hashgacha Pratis – divine intervention means believing that Hashem guides even the minutest details of the universe. From this belief stems the belief that life is not random. Rather, everything that happens in life is for a purpose.

Once, one of the Baal Shem Tov's students noticed that a leaf had fallen from a tree in the distance. The student asked the Baal Shem Tov about the significance of this occurrence; why did Hashem cause the leaf to fall? The Baal Shem Tov instructed his student to lift up the leaf, which the student did. Under the leaf was a caterpillar. Now the student understood the reason why the leaf had fallen; the leaf fell in order to provide shade for the caterpillar.

Back to yeshivah, Eli Berkoff was thinking as he rode along the green-fringed mountain roads. Although he was a friendly, outgoing person, at this moment he was glad to be sitting in the backseat, removed from the animated conversation taking place between his friends Chaim and Shmuel in the front.

The trip back from camp provided a brief time for thinking, for letting go of the relaxed mood of summer and embracing the challenges of the new year. In yeshivah, everyone knew Eli as a staunch, reliable friend, a serious student and, most notably, the "guy with the pushka." (the one who went around during minyan with the tzedaka box).

Every morning at Shacharis, Eli could be seen carrying the pushka around the beis medrash, collecting a few coins or a dollar from each student. No one could say no to Eli. Going back to yeshivah would be great, he said to himself. There was still so much to accomplish.

His eyes scanned the passing scenery as his friend Chaim's compact four-door Oldsmobile merged neatly onto the Garden State Parkway. The ride proceeded at a smooth, relaxed pace, and Chaim handled the steering wheel lightly, adjusting a little to the left, a little to the right as the road wound its way south. Suddenly, as if a phantom had grabbed the steering wheel, the car lurched sharply to the right. Chaim battled the steering wheel, yanking it with all his might back to the center, but the car had a mind of its own. Like a child's toy, it flipped on its side and began tumbling, crashing over the guardrail and launching Chaim, Eli and Shmuel into a free fall down a 100-foot cliff.

Eli landed just a few feet from the car, which lay like a dead insect on its back, its wheels jutting uselessly into the air. He didn't know how long he had been lying there before he regained consciousness. The first thing he noticed was the car. It could easily have landed on top of him, but Hashem had saved him from that crushing blow. As he looked around for his friends, however, he realized that they were trapped inside, perhaps seriously injured. Although he lay a few hundred yards away from a well-traveled highway, he felt as though he were utterly alone in a vast void — a speck of dust floating through the eternity of outer space.

Maybe I can move, he thought. Maybe I can get out of here. But his muscles wouldn't respond to his wish. He was in the middle of the woods with no help in sight. Then he noticed something that turned the situation from merely frightening to potentially lethal. His upper arm was deeply gashed and blood was spurting from the wound faster than he could ever have imagined blood could flow. He tried to scream, but he had no strength. In the midst of the thick forest underbrush, surrounded by nothing but moss-covered rocks and trees, there was no one to hear him but G-d. "Hashem yeracheim!" he cried. "G-d, have mercy on me. I'm completely in Your hands. Please make a miracle ... save me!"

Suddenly, out of nowhere, two men arrived at his side. They were athletic, confident-looking men who seemed completely at home in this untamed swath of roadside wilderness. "Hi, my name is Todd, and this is my friend Brian," the taller of the two men said. "Don't worry. We're going to help you. Just so happens we're a couple of soldiers on leave from the Army, and believe me, we're trained to deal with all kinds of crazy accidents. This is nothing compared to the time we had to ...." Todd kept talking to Eli, apparently to prevent him from going into shock and sliding back into unconsciousness. Meanwhile, Brian ran to the overturned car, grabbed a jacket off the front seat and ran back to Eli, whose blood was still rushing from the wound. "We're going to make you a tourniquet to stop the blood flow," Brian told him. He began wrapping the jacket tightly around Eli's shoulder. Todd fetched a stick and wedged it between Eli's arm and the jacket. He then twisted it to tighten the tourniquet as much as possible. The bleeding stopped. "You're going to be all right," Todd told Eli. "An ambulance is on its way."

Eli watched helplessly as his two saviors receded back into the forest, leaving him alone once again, still desperately in need of medical attention. But before his fears could fully surface above his murky consciousness, he witnessed the magnificent sight of a crew of Hatzolah volunteers heading down the slope with a stretcher. Their faces betrayed the seriousness of the situation as they rapidly transferred him to the stretcher and edged carefully back up the slope, holding onto a rope they had rigged in advance to prevent slipping. "This tourniquet saved your life," they told Eli as they examined Brian's and Todd's handiwork. Fortunately, this ambulance was one of the few equipped with a device called mast pants, which are pants that compress the legs and push blood back up to the heart. With the mast pants, the Hatzolah crew was able to keep Eli alive until he reached the emergency room. There, Eli found out that, of the six pints of blood contained in a healthy human body, he had lost four. His blood pressure was unobtainable. "You were as near as you could have come to the Next World," the doctor told him.

His life had been saved, but recovery was slow. Yeshivah began that year without Eli, and his friends kept careful track of his progress. One day, a student reported to Eli's rebbi that the doctors felt they had no choice but to amputate Eli's arm. The tourniquet had cut off the blood supply so completely that the arm did not seem to be capable of recovering its full circulation. "It's impossible," said the rebbi. "The hand that held that pushka every day will not be amputated." And it was not. Two weeks after the accident, Eli asked his mother to help him identify the men who had saved his life so that he could thank them. She contacted the state police and spoke to an officer who had been at the scene. "Sir, by any chance do you know who those kind men were who saved my son's life?" The officer replied, "What men? When we arrived, no one with the description you're giving was there." Mrs. Berkoff was confused. She decided to contact Hatzalah. Surely they would know who had helped Eli just moments before they arrived. But once again, she received a bewildered response. As Eli and his family reviewed the frantic jumble of events surrounding the accident, they became certain that Eli's rescuers were "angels." Would men who were kind enough and able enough to save him have left him unattended? Would two soldiers on leave have been spending their time in the empty wilderness alongside the Garden State Parkway? Would they, under natural circumstances, have arrived at just the right moment, possessing just the right rescue skills?

Eli recalled the pure cry he had uttered from the depths of his soul — "Hashem yerachaim ... have mercy on me," and he was certain that Brian and Todd were messengers of the Divine mercy for which he had pleaded. Just as Hashem had sent His messengers to our forefather, Avraham, in the form of travelers, He had sent these messengers to Eli! (Stories for the Jewish Heart Rabbi B. Pruzansky, p.67) **Good Shabbos Everyone.**