

ArtScroll Series®

STORIES
THAT
LIGHT UP
YOUR HEART

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SAVE GALI!

Nothing happens by chance. In fact, the Hebrew word for “happen,” which is “yikre,” shares a root with the word (and name of the Torah portion) “Vayikra,” meaning “and He called.” The connection is simple — everything that happens is Hashem’s call to us, urging us to better ourselves and come closer to Him. When we answer the call, amazing things can happen, as this story so dramatically illustrates.

The swimming pool sparkled invitingly in its landscaped setting behind the Aminoff family’s Miami Beach condo, in the Green Diamond on Collins Ave. It was July 26th, 2010, and the only place to be on this humid, tropical day was in the water. Jonathan Aminoff had an idea that would make the day something really special. He turned to his two oldest sons and asked, “Who wants to go jet skiing?”

There was unanimous approval for the idea. One quick call to the jet-ski rental office solidified the plan. They had 2 p.m. reservations, which fit perfectly into Jonathan’s schedule. He would be back in time for the last hour of stock-market trading, enabling him to maintain the delicate balance between work and family time.

Charlene, Jonathan’s wife, was happy to come along. The Aminoff’s infant was indoors, in the loving care of Charlene’s mother. Gali, the couple’s 2-year-old, slept peacefully on a lounge chair by the pool. “Keep an eye on her please,” Charlene told her housekeeper. “We won’t be gone for more than an hour.”

Soon, Jonathan, Charlene and their two sons, along with Charlene’s 18-year-old brother, arrived at the boating area, eager to embark on their afternoon adventure. However, they discovered

that there were no jet-skis available. One jet-ski had broken down and with no extra ones on hand, the Aminoffs would have to wait for someone to return to the dock. It took some time, but eventually, Jonathan and his sons were on board, enjoying the speed and cool ocean spray as they bumped along the surface of the water. It was nearly 3 p.m. when they returned to the dock.

"Oh, boy, we better get moving," Jonathan told his wife. "I'm going to miss the last hour of trading."

At that moment, Jonathan caught sight of Charlene's brother, who was walking toward them from the rental office. He was completely dry and from the look of his flushed face, he was hot as well.

"You didn't go out on the water?" Jonathan asked him.

"No, that's what I wanted to tell you. You have to be 21 to go out alone. They wouldn't rent to me. So what do you say, Jonathan — want to take me out?"

Jonathan looked at the expectant face of his brother-in-law and felt the tug of conflict. Missing the stock market's closing hour or disappointing his brother-in-law — neither seemed like a good choice. "Oh, well," Jonathan said to himself, "we'll go out for 15 minutes or so, have some fun, and I can still catch the last half-hour of trading."

The two men were soon skidding along the waves. By the time the entire adventure was concluded, the afternoon had slipped away.

"You know, it's 3:30 already," Jonathan told his family. "It's too late for me to try to get any work done. Why don't we just go back to the condo and have a swim?"

Happily anticipating another hour of enjoyable family time, Jonathan and company arrived at the entrance to the condo complex pool. In seconds, however, they were jolted into another reality.

"Call 911!" voices were screaming from the pool area. "Quick! Someone call 911!"

Jonathan, a 20-year veteran of Queens Hatzolah, sprang into action. He ran to the site of the commotion and saw there an elderly man standing in the shallow section of the pool. In the man's arms lay the limp form of a child. As he closed in on the scene, Jonathan's eyes beheld a sight that sent his heart leaping into his throat. "Gali!" he screamed.

Jumping into the pool, Jonathan raced toward the man and retrieved the lifeless child. He carried her out of the pool and lay her gently on the ground. A crowd formed around him as he set to work trying to resuscitate his child. He blew the breath of life into her tiny body. He pressed on her small, still chest. There was no pulse.

"Come back to Daddy!" he shouted to her. "Come back!" he pled as he resumed his rescue efforts.

Meanwhile, Charlene stood by watching the nightmare unfold. Desperate, helpless, she begged Hashem to bring back her darling daughter. How would she stand such a loss? She needed to pray. Suddenly, a line from Chapter 119 of *Tehillim* sprang forth from her memory: "*Karasi bechol lev. Aneini Hashem. Chukecha etzora*" (I called to You, Hashem, with all my heart. Answer me. I will keep Your ways).

She had no doubt as to what she had to do. There was one mitzvah she had held back from Hashem, one area in which she allowed herself an exemption. As much as she wished she were able to do it, it was just too hard. But now, as her child's life ebbed away from her forever, nothing was too hard. She grabbed a blue pashmina shawl that hung on a nearby chair and cried out a *berachah* — "*Baruch Atah ... shebecheyanu vekiyemanu vehigianu lazeman hazeh*" (Blessed are You, Hashem, King of the Universe, Who has kept me alive, sustained me, and brought me to this time!). Then she wrapped the shawl around her head to cover her hair.

Meanwhile, as Jonathan feverishly fought to bring Gali back to life, he caught sight of his wife's action. Immediately, he understood what she was doing. They needed a merit; they needed

a miracle. Jonathan raised his eyes to heaven and quickly offered his own prayer.

When he finished, he placed his fingers once more against his daughter's neck, feeling desperately for the tiniest little pulse — anything to indicate that she had not crossed the irreversible line between this world and the next.

And then, he felt it. A weak, barely discernible movement. And yet, it meant life.

"A pulse!" he cried out exultantly. "I found a pulse!"

Within moments, the sweetest sound in creation filled the air. Gali was crying. The ambulance arrived as the crowd shared in the potent mixture of joy and relief. As the EMTs prepared Gali for a trip to the hospital, they shot questions at Jonathan.

"How long was she under water?" one EMT asked.

"We have no idea. We weren't here when it happened," he said.

They brought Gali to the nearest hospital. Meanwhile, Jonathan got the building manager to play the security video that was recording at the pool during the time of the accident. At last, Jonathan and Charlene found out what had led to their daughter's shocking brush with death.

The video showed Gali waking up from her nap while the housekeeper dozed nearby. The little girl slipped off the lounge chair and toddled to the edge of the pool. There, she noticed something in the water — some floating object that she fancied. She bent over to retrieve it, stretching her tiny fingers out over the water, and then, with a quick, nearly silent motion, she dropped into the water. There was barely a splash.

The video confirmed that she remained submerged for three minutes and ten seconds until another condo resident named Richard discovered her and lifted her out of the water. There he stood, holding the child, as the Aminoffs returned to the pool from their jet-skiing trip.

On reporting the sequence of events to the doctors at Gali's hospital, Jonathan began to understand the magnitude of the

miracle he had experienced. "It is extremely rare for someone to remain under water for that long and not sustain very serious complications," they told him.

Once Gali's condition was confirmed as stable, the family was advised to transfer her to Miami's children's hospital for observation and testing. The doctors were certain that more sensitive probing would uncover some brain damage as a result of the oxygen deprivation that Gali had endured. At the very least, the child should be observed for signs of pneumonia or other lung problems.

While at the children's hospital, Gali was examined by a top neurologist, Dr. Keith Meyer. He conducted an exhaustive series of tests, ultimately concluding that Gali had emerged from her ordeal utterly unscathed.

"Still, we'd like to keep her here for another 24 hours," Gali's doctor told her parents.

"But why?" Jonathan insisted. "If she's all right, then let her come home!"

"Because we are doctors," he answered, "and doctors are scientists. We can't just chalk this up to a miracle, even though it certainly looks like one. I mean, there are other children here who are drowning victims, you know. One of them was under water for 30 seconds and has a lung infection. Another was under for 40 seconds and has brain damage. Your daughter's situation makes no sense from a medical standpoint. We just want to keep an eye on her for another 24 hours to be sure."

At this point, Charlene interceded. "Doctor, do you happen to be Jewish?" she asked.

"Well, yeah, I am. But I'm not religious," he replied.

"But do you believe in G-d?"

"Well, whatever I believed up until now, I have to admit there's a G-d in the world. Gali is the proof. There's no other explanation for a miracle like this."

When the doctor left the room, Charlene turned to her husband and told him, "When I saw what was happening to Gali, I some-

how felt that I had to show Hashem that I would not hold back anything from Him. So I made a *neder* that I would cover my hair from now on.”

Jonathan nodded. “I saw you,” he said. “I realized what you were doing, and I knew I had to offer something too. So I looked up to heaven and I told Hashem, ‘I’ve been in Hatzolah for 20 years. I’ve run out in the freezing cold, in snowstorms and hurricanes, in the blistering heat, in the middle of the night — and I’ve never asked for anything in return. But please, right now, let it all be a merit for Gali’s life. In return, I promise that I will continue volunteering for Hatzolah for another 20 years.’ It was just then, while you were covering your hair and I was making this promise, that Gali came back to life.”

Shortly after Gali’s release from the hospital, the Aminoffs made a *seudas hoda’ah* to thank Hashem for their miracle. One of the honored guests was Richard, the man who had lifted Gali out of the water. In speaking to him, Jonathan learned of an entirely new facet of his daughter’s amazing rescue.

“This was much more of a miracle than you know,” Richard told him. “You see, I travel a great deal and I spend very little time here in Miami. And when I am here, I rarely come to the swimming pool. It just so happens that on the day of Gali’s accident, I had decided to do some laps back and forth across the deep end. I had no business at all in the shallow water. But when I finished my laps and went to climb out on the ladder, I felt a sharp pain in my leg. I realized that I must have pulled a tendon. So I figured, I’ll swim over to the shallow end and come out on the stairs. That would be easier on the leg.

“As I got out of the pool and looked back, I noticed the shadow of a child under the water. I ran back into the pool and pulled out your daughter. If not for the pain in my leg, I would have never seen your daughter in the pool.”



When the Aminoffs returned to their year-round home in New York, they decided that it was time to tend to Gali's long-standing problem of sleep apnea. This is a condition in which the sufferer periodically stops breathing during sleep. The interruption in air supply causes the person to wake up many times during the night. Gali was not only tired and listless from this condition, but she also had little appetite. The specialist who was caring for Gali had wanted to remove her tonsils, which were very enlarged. At first, Charlene refused the surgery, hoping that the situation would right itself. Ultimately, the doctor convinced Charlene that the surgery was necessary. However, she insisted that it wait until after the Florida vacation.

Now that the family was home, the parents brought their precious miracle child back to the specialist to schedule the tonsil surgery. Jonathan told the doctor the story of Gali's miraculous drowning and revival.

"Do you think her tonsils could have somehow protected her?" Jonathan asked.

"I don't see how that could have happened. The tonsils had nothing to do with it," the doctor replied with certainty.

The day of the surgery arrived and Gali's parents sat nervously in the waiting room, praying that the procedure should prove to be as simple as expected. Their wait was interrupted by the sudden appearance of the doctor, who looked ominously agitated. Clearly, something was wrong.

"Doctor!" Jonathan said. "What happened? Is everything all right?"

"Yes, everything's all right," the doctor replied. "But your daughter's case is something I have never seen before in my life. Her tonsils really did save her from drowning.

"You see, the moment the anesthesiologist tried to place the respiration tube in your daughter's throat so that I could start the procedure, her tonsils closed up so tight that we could barely get the tube into her. And when we began to read her oxygen levels, they were so high that she didn't require the oxygen.

"Your daughter's sleep apnea and her enlarged tonsils have literally been training her body for the past two years to survive on very low levels of oxygen. That is why she was able to stay under the water so long without suffering from oxygen deprivation.

"But if you would have taken my advice and had her tonsils removed before you went to Florida, her body would have come back into normal balance. She would not have been able to go more than 30 seconds without some negative consequences."



The Aminoff's miracle was thus revealed to be a diamond of many facets. Each aspect of it, however, was but another expression of Hashem's kindness. Hashem had called Jonathan and Charlene to action, and they had heeded the call. Longing to do something more, something that would let the whole world know of Hashem's goodness, they started Gali's Couture Wigs, a company based in New York, that sells beautiful wigs at sharply reduced prices. They not only heeded the message, but have devoted themselves to spreading it far and wide.

Due to the sequence of events, Jonathan returned to the pool area in time to save Gali. Had Richard not made a rare stop in Miami and the even rarer decision to take a swim, or had not suffered the misfortune of an injured leg, he would not have seen Gali. Had Gali not been born with sleep apnea, she may not have survived under the water for so long. And had the operation taken place before the family's trip to Florida, her unusual condition would not have saved her.

Hashgachah pratis (Divine intervention) was certainly at work laying the foundation for Gali's miracle. But what set the miracle in motion was the Aminoffs decision to do something to merit a miracle. When we do our part, Hashem does His.
