

“Fingerprints” From Heaven

Doug Eisenberg’s wife had become *frum*. Doug’s brother Steve had become *frum*. But, despite their attempts to inspire him, Doug was unconvinced. The loss of his beloved father at the age of fifteen had built a wall between him and Hashem. It would take heavenly intercession — perhaps from Doug’s father himself — to get Doug to scale that wall.

Rabbi Kolarsky, the head of Brit Avraham, a New Jersey organization that arranges *brisim* and halachic marriages for Russian immigrants, knew Doug through his wife’s involvement in their projects. He suggested to Doug that it would bring blessing into his life if he were the *sandek* at a *bris* for a Russian immigrant. Of course, with infants, the *sandek* holds the baby on his lap. For older children and adults, the *sandek* stands at the head of the treatment table and cradles in his hands the head of the person undergoing the *bris*.

Doug reluctantly acquiesced to be *sandek* at the *bris* of an eight-year-old Russian boy. This boy’s father had recently died, so perhaps Doug’s empathy for the child induced him to accept the role.

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Doug arrived promptly on the designated day, but there was no sign of the boy or his mother. The *mohel*, Rabbi Kolarsky, and Doug waited for over one hour, but the Russian woman and her son never showed up. Doug left, shaking his head at the waste of time.

A couple of weeks later, Rabbi Kolarsky phoned Doug. The *bris* had been rescheduled and this time the boy would definitely be there. Doug was about to refuse. Then he realized that the rescheduled date fell on his father's *yahrtzeit*. For his father's sake, Doug agreed to come.

With the boy's head cupped in his hands, Doug stood there daydreaming throughout the short ceremony. Then it came time to bestow his Hebrew name on the boy. The name, Zev Wolfe, jolted Doug out of his reverie. Zev Wolfe was Doug's father's name.

Afterward, Doug was introduced to the boy's mother, Chana. Doug did a double take. The name of his father's mother was also Chana. *Zev Wolfe ben Chana*. As Doug reflected on the "coincidence," he realized another similarity. This boy was eight years old, the same age as Doug's brother Jeff when his father passed away.

Hesitantly, Doug ventured to inquire how old little Zev Wolfe's father was when he died. The answer, forty-one, made Doug's heart skip a beat. His own father was forty-one when he died.

Was this the supernal reason that the *bris*, originally scheduled for two weeks before, took place instead on his father's *yahrtzeit*?

Doug felt as if he was reading a telegram from Heaven, perhaps dispatched by his own father. His wife, his brother, and the rabbi had been urging him to get more involved with Judaism, but Doug had resisted. Now, by taking one small step in agreeing to act as *sandek*, Doug had entered a scene full of his father's "fingerprints."

Doug continued to move forward. Within a few years of that fateful *bris*, Doug became completely mitzvah observant.



Shimi Kaplan was an American student at Yeshivas Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem's Old City. During his years there, he had become close to the Old City's favorite couple, Natie and Irma Charles. "Bubby Irma" was the author of the famed cookbook, *Adventures in Bubby Irma's Kitchen*. The couple's hospitality was legendary, but what most impressed everyone about Natie and Bubby Irma was that they had become religiously observant, drastically changing their whole lives, when they were already in their sixties.

On the *Motza'ei Shabbos* this story occurred, Bubby Irma had recently died at the age of eighty-one and Natie was in Hadassah Hospital for an orthopedic ailment. Shimi Kaplan decided to go visit Natie.

As Shimi conversed with Natie, Motty, a middle-aged, bare-headed Israeli lying two beds away, said to Shimi, "I recognized Natie from over thirty years ago. He used to give me rides when I was a soldier in the army."

An elderly man lying in the bed between the two men piped up, "This is such an amazing coincidence that you two are in the same hospital room."

To that Motty replied, "There is no such thing as coincidence. If you rearrange the letters of *mikreh*, you get 'rak mei'Hashem,' which means, 'it's only from Hashem.'"

Shimi was surprised by such a profession of *emunah*. Motty looked like the typical secular Israeli. "That was a beautiful *dvar Torah*," Shimi told him, "but how do you know that there is no such thing as coincidence?"

Motty responded with this story:

About ten years ago I worked picking up and delivering dry cleaning. While I was driving one day, due to some freak accident, my car flipped over. I wasn't hurt, but the car was damaged and would need to be towed. It was financially a bad time for me and this added expense would sink me even deeper in debt. I phoned my wife, but she wasn't home. Then I phoned my neighbor, who offered to come and pick me up. While I waited, think-

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ing about how much this freak accident was going to cost me, I got angrier and angrier until I looked up at heaven and cursed God for putting me through this.

When my neighbor finally picked me up, he decided to take a shortcut home by driving through an Arab village. We got home okay, so the next time I was in that area, I decided to take the same shortcut. As I was driving through the Arab village, suddenly I heard a crash and the next thing I knew a large, sharp stone hurtled through my windshield and hit me right on the side of my head.

By some miracle, I kept driving, although my head was gushing blood and my vision was blurry. I was rushed to the hospital, where it took a long time just to clean the glass out of my eyes and skull. Finally I got my stitches: five inside my head and ten outside. The doctor said to me, "What's amazing is that if the rock would have hit you one centimeter to the left, you would be blind in that eye, and if it would have hit you one centimeter higher, you would be dead."

I replied, Mikreh!

The next day I went to the eye doctor because my eyesight was very blurry. He examined me and said, Don't worry. Your vision will be fine in a few days. But what's amazing is that all the glass that went into your eyes hit only the white part of your eyes. If the glass had gone into your pupil or your iris, you'd be blind.

I replied, Mikreh!

I was bedridden for ten days. Toward the end of my recovery, my wife told me that she wanted me to go to the synagogue and say the blessing of HaGomel. I adamantly refused. I'm not going to thank God for almost killing me, I insisted. But she kept nagging me, so a week later I agreed to go.

The parashah that week was Parashat Emor. When I told them I needed to bentch gomel, I was given an aliyah, the seventh aliyah. As I stood there next to the

Torah, I heard the words being read: God spoke to Moshe saying, "Take the one who has cursed God ... and stone him" (Leviticus 24:13).

I couldn't say mikreh anymore. I had cursed God and gotten stoned, and here I was in the synagogue, where I never went, hearing those precise words.

So I started reading books about Judaism and going to classes. I realized that it's all true. I started putting on tefillin daily and committed to growing as a Jew. But I had lived as a secular person my entire life. It was hard to make a complete lifestyle change. I couldn't bring myself to make a complete 180° turn around. So, for the last ten years, I've been stuck. I believe in the truth of Torah, but I'm too old to take on all the mitzvahs.

When Motty finished his story, he said to Shimi, "Now do you see why I say there are no coincidences?"

Shimi smiled. "Absolutely. And I can tell you that it's no coincidence that you're sharing a hospital room with Natie Charles. You think you're too old to start practicing all the mitzvahs, but Natie took on mitzvah observance at the age of sixty-two!"

Shimi finished his visit with Natie and got up to leave. He turned to Motty and said, "If you want to get well quicker, make a commitment to take on more mitzvahs."

With tears in his eyes, Motty replied, "I just did."