

**Miracles – United Hatzalah**  
by Rabbi Susie Heneson Moskowitz  
Sept 2015

Eli Hirshberg is a 50 year old banker. He and his wife and 5 children were sitting down to Shabbat dinner and their home in Modi'in, a city between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

His youngest son says, "Abba it's Shabbat, we need to make Kiddush quickly so that we can do it before your beeper goes off."

They sit down and have a lovely dinner. But at the end of dinner the beeper does go off, Eli checks his app, sees that there is an emergency situation in nearby and runs out the door.

He arrives at an apartment house and a young man comes running out "My aunt Nurit is lying on the floor. She is acting drunk but she didn't have anything to drink. Please help her."

Eli runs up the stairs and immediately recognizes the signs of a diabetic coma. He tests her blood and her sugars come up at an alarming 37. He applies a glucose solution to Nurit's gums and revives her.

How long did this take? 2 minutes. All of this, from the time the beeper went off to Nurit being revived, took less than 2 minutes. How long did it take for the regular ambulance to arrive..... 5 minutes, 5 minutes later... an ambulance arrived.

If Eli hadn't gotten there so quickly, Nurit would be dead.  
If Eli had not been on an Ambucycle, he couldn't have gotten there so fast.  
Eli might not have been on a Ambucycle if we, the Temple Beth Torah community, had not raised the funds to buy this exact Ambucycle.

Last spring we, raised \$29,000 for United Hatzalah. They used this money to buy a motorcycle, and outfitted as an Ambucycle. The ambucycle, #537, is the one that Eli drove on that Shabbat night. The one he rode to save a life.

We raised the money in 2 months last spring and .. by the end of July we had helped to save a life. Awesome. Wow.

Chances are none of us could have or would have done this alone. But 55 children from our religious school, every child in our Nursery school, plus 143 families participated in this mitzvah. Donations from \$1 to \$2500 added up to \$29,000. Not only did we raise enough money to buy an ambucycle, but we got upgraded ...to a Honda motorcycle.

And this ambucycle, #537, is in the town of Modi'im, saving lives. Without our help Eli Hershberg could not have saved Nurit's life.

This summer, the handsome Rabbi Moskowitz and I were invited to the dedication of ambucycle #537. My first reaction was, it is just the two of us, I don't have a group of the congregation coming to Israel with me, you really don't need to do this.

Fortunately, they didn't listen to me, and Jason said, "You'll like it. The dedication ceremonies are really nice."

I didn't just like it, I loved it. It was a spectacular moment in my life.

I was having trouble articulating why this moment was so special. Then a wise friend said – you were experiencing the miracle of being part of something that was completely outside of yourself. It didn't have anything to do with your role as wife, or mother or friend. It didn't have to do with your work as Rabbi or teacher. You were part of that miracle of being part of something bigger than you.

Thank you for enabling me to feel this miracle. I hope in sharing my excitement, you are able to feel this miracle too.

I urge you to go to our website and under my column are links to some pictures and a video of the dedication experience.

Some of you have been with us on this journey of learning about United Hatzalah and donating to them since winter. For those of you who haven't been or need a refresher – let me bring you up to speed.

Marylyn and Paul Lieberman learned about United Hatzalah from Joanie Poznick, whose family had recently purchased an Ambucycle in memory of her late husband, Irving. Marylyn and Paul brought this idea to me and we brought in the Social Action Committee. Jen Nussbaum was at the meeting and was taken by the idea so she agreed to work with Marylyn to chair an effort to raise \$26,000 in 2 months – enough money to buy an Ambucycle.

The first time I heard the word Ambucycle, I started to correct Marylyn. It sounded strange. But an Ambucycle is a motorcycle that is fully equipped for Emergency Medical first responders. It can do everything an Ambulance can do except transport patients to the hospital.

Many of us had the privilege of meeting another Eli this past spring, Eli Be'er the founder and visionary of United Hatzalah.

When Eli was a 15 year old paramedic, even though you needed to be 16 to apply to the program, he went through the training and then started to go out on calls to save lives. The problem – by the time the ambulance arrived, the patient was dead. He was frustrated that too many calls ended this way. He was told, "we do our best, this is just the way it is."

He went into this business to save lives not to get there too late. He knew that there had to be a better way.

So he and 4 friends just started -- saving lives. In the beginning they illegally listened in on police radio scanners and got to the scene first. Now they have a command center that monitors the whole country from a room in Jerusalem. The operator sends out a signal to the 5 volunteers who are nearest the scene. They check their app, confirm that they are on their way and go. If the command center doesn't get a response quickly enough, the call goes out to the next 5 and so on. If they only need 3 responders they stop the call once they hear 3 yeses.

It really quite an amazing operation. They have Ambuboots, Ambucars and around 450 Ambucycles on the road today. They have had to retire some along the way but ours is the 537<sup>th</sup> one on the streets. Some are even designed for off-roading, which is very helpful in the desert and other remote areas. Eli Be'er took what many would dismiss as an impenetrable barrier and found ways to think outside the box. In doing so, he has saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

One person saw a problem. Dreamed up a solution. Tested it and refined it. And has made a difference in so many ways.

The world needs more people like that. Visionaries and leaders. People who when they are told that something is impossible, respond by making the impossible... possible.

Rabbi Ed Feinstein, who I had the privilege of studying with at the Hartman Institute this summer, has a new book called the "The Chutzpah Imperative."

He says:

"The gift of Judaism is an understanding of what it means to be a human being....It is a celebration of human freedom, human possibility, and human responsibility. Judaism is a way to live a heroic life, to construct a life devoted to values that are eternal, values of ultimate significance. The reward of a Jewish life is walking the world with a profound faith that you matter, your life matters, your dreams matter."<sup>1</sup>

I think I'll sign up! Judaism is about constructing a way of life that matters. A life that elevates our dreams for a better world.

How does it do so?

By compelling us to have Chutzpah in even the most difficult situations. Usually that means going against the common masses and often going against common sense. It means challenging authority, even if that authority is God; and it means demanding justice and righteous.

The first time the word chutzpah is used in Jewish text is in the Talmud. It refers to the land of Israel which "despite all its devastation, remains irrepressibly

fertile.”<sup>iii</sup> The impossible becomes possible. Even the Land of the Jewish people has chutzpah!

What we need in this world are people with chutzpah – people who when they are told “that can be done” get more motivated to find a solution. People who are motivated to find solutions that help others. People like Eli Be’er. We call those people leaders and innovators, but they need followers.

While Eli had the courage, the chutzpah, to go up against the confines of an existing system, he was even more effective when others joined his cause.

And that is what we did.

We did it together – a Group effort - people made phone calls at someone’s office that we turned into a call center, Chavurah groups fundraised, we had a special yoga class and all the proceeds went to the Ambucycle.

Since April several congregants have continued their involvement with United Hatzalah. Jesse purchased a defibulator to go on one of the Ambucycles as his Bar Mitzvah donation. Joan is sponsoring an EMS, Jake and Dylan spied an ambucycle on the streets of Jerusalem.

Together we made if not the impossible, the certain unlikely – the ability to raise enough money in 2 months, possible and we’ve saved a life.

United Hatzalah is saving lives in another way too.

They are Building bridges. Bridges between people who would never come in contact with each other in their everyday lives.

Arab Israelis and Jewish Israelis, Secular and Charedi, Orthodox and Reform. People who would never talk to each other are coming together for EMS training. They work together in the control room. They celebrate together at United Hatzalah outings. They save lives across these borders.

The day we were there the room was staffed by Orthodox men who were doing their army service through United Hatzalah. Eli told us that the Israeli Muslim shift would be coming in in the evening after they broke their fast for Ramadan.

This degree of intergroup cooperation would be a feat anywhere, but in Israel it is another -miracle.

While we can’t set out to do a miracle – (there is something about miracles that by definition can’t be orchestrated); We can see obstacles as opportunities. We can work to make the impossible, possible. We can employ some good old fashion Jewish chutzpah and make our community one in which we follow courageous ideas that make life better for the world.

So think about ways you can use your Chutzpah, and I know you have it, to make the world better for someone else. Ways that when you look back, you might see, that you were part of a miracle.

---

<sup>i</sup> The Chutzpah Imperative: Empowering Today's Jews for a Life that Matters. Rabbi Edward Feinstein. Jewish Lights p. xix.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.