

Do you have a lucky number? I'd like to begin today's remarks with a story of three fathers -- each of whom had a 'lucky number'.

Three men are in the maternity waiting room at Hadassah Hospital in Israel. A doctor comes in and says to the first man, "Mazel Tov, your wife just gave birth to quadruplets!"

The man replied, "Wow, what a coincidence. I live in Kiryat Arbah and *arba* is four -- and four is my lucky number! "

Another doctor comes in and says to the second man, "Mazel Tov! Your wife just gave birth to septuplets."

The second man replies, "I can't believe it. What a coincidence. I live in Be'er Sheva, *sheva* is seven -- and seven is my lucky number!"

Just then, the third man faints and falls onto the floor. The others rush over to him and one of the doctors is able to revive him. "Sir" he says, "what happened? Are you alright?"

The man looks at the doctor and smiles weakly, "I live in Meah Shearim. The neighborhood of a *hundred* gates -- and one hundred is my lucky number!"

It is true that Judaism values some numbers more than others. Seven is one of the greatest power numbers in Judaism, representing Creation, spirituality, good fortune, and blessing.

-- Shabbos is the seventh day, and the *shmitta*, the sabbatical cycle for the Land of Israel occurs each seventh year.

-- There are seven laws of Noah and seven Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Several Jewish holidays are seven days long. . The menorah in the Temple has seven branches.

-- A Hebrew word for good fortune, *gad*, equals seven in gematria (the numerical value of the Hebrew letters). Another Hebrew word for good fortune, *mazal*, equals seventy-seven.

But ....a lucky number? In Judaism, there's no such thing. In fact, the words luck, chance, accident, fate, kismet and coincidence don't have a place in the vocabulary or world-view of someone who believes in the Torah concept of G-d. Why? Because according to the Torah, things happens for a reason.

In a presidential address in 1983, Ronald Reagan, quoting Benjamin Franklin, said:

*The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that G-d governs in the affairs of*

*man.*

French poet Anatole France said:

*Chance is the pseudonym G-d uses when He'd rather not sign His own name.*

Within the Torah there are multiple source indicating that G-d runs the show. When the sons of Jacob were astonished to learn that the viceroy of Egypt was none other than Joseph, their brother who they tried to kill, Joseph said:

*You meant evil against me, but G-d meant it for good -- as clear as day -- in order to save all these people. (Gen. 50:20)*

This raises an obvious question. In the great Torah stories like that of Joseph and his brothers, we can clearly see the hand of Hashem. But when we say that G-d is running the show and things happens for a reason, does that mean *everything* happens for a reason?

I'd like to share a story that may answer this question.

Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, kashrus administrator for the Chicago Rabbinical Council (CRC) travels the world as one of the busiest executives in the kosher business today. But this past spring in the midst of his busy schedule, he received a phone call that not only changed his life, but that of another Jew as well.

The call was from Rabbi Yitzchok Hecht of Henderson, Nevada.

*"Rabbi Fishbane, it's Rabbi Hecht. Did you lose your tefillin?"*

This wasn't the phone call Rabbi Fishbane was expecting, but a chill ran down his spine. In fact, a dozen years ago, he was in Las Vegas working for the CRC when his precious tefillin, inherited from his grandfather, a Holocaust survivor, and his talis, given to him by his wife as a wedding gift, were stolen out of his car. . Rabbi Fishbane said his grandfather fainted when he told him that his tefillin were stolen.

Now it was Rabbi Fishbane's turn to almost faint.

Was it possible that he would be reunited with his precious tefillin? Who was this Rabbi Hecht on the phone, and how did he come to find his stolen tefillin?

A Jew with a limited religious background, Josh D., a professional driver for the luxury hotel Wynn Las Vegas, one day took a new route home and 'by chance', stopped at a yard sale. Among the junk, he noticed a pair of tefillin and a tallis.

Although he didn't know much about Judaism, Josh knew that the items were significant and that they might have some real value to their previous owner. For \$20, he bought them -- along with

a pair of roller skates.

As soon as he left the yard sale, Josh looked inside the tefillin bag and found a siddur with Rabbi Fishbane's childhood address and phone number. He took out his cell phone and called the number, but, just to add some comedy to this tale, the archdiocese of Chicago was on the other end of the line! Josh hung up the phone.

What to do now? Josh remembered that nearby there was a Jewish bookstore with a shul and learning center. He thought that perhaps someone who worked there could help him find the tefillin's rightful owner. He met Rabbi Hecht, who runs the gift shop and is the assistant rabbi of the shul. After exchanging pleasantries, Josh showed Rabbi Hecht what he had bought at the yard sale.

Rabbi Hecht immediately recognized the name in the siddur and told Josh he would take care of it for him.

Josh was a bit skeptical, so Rabbi Hecht said he would get the rabbi on the phone then and there. Rabbi Hecht tapped "CRC" into Google, found the number, and placed the call.

After Rabbi Hecht gave Rabbi Fishbane the great news -- that he had his talis and tefillin -- his first words were:

"Where are they?"

"In Henderson, Nevada," responded Rabbi Hecht.

"Henderson, Nevada?" cried out Rabbi Fishbane.

They could have been anywhere in the entire world.

Incredibly, the Pesach program Rabbi Fishbane was due to supervise, was taking place in... drumroll please... Henderson, Nevada.

The Hand of Hashem was written all over this happy news. As soon as Rabbi Fishbane was settled in his hotel in Henderson, he sought out Josh, and once again held his grandfather's precious tefillin in his hands.

But that's not the end of the story.

When one of the owners of a local luxury hotel -- a Chabad chasid named Shimmy -- witnessed the whole scene between Josh and Rabbi Fishbane, the chasid said to Josh, "Josh, did you put on tefillin today?"

When Josh answered, 'I've never put tefillin on in my life,' Shimmy said 'Josh, please come back to the hotel Friday morning, We're going to make you a bar mitzvah!'

And just like Shimmy promised, when Josh returned to the hotel on Friday, he celebrated his bar mitzvah in front of about 100 hotel guests, followed by a scrumptious breakfast celebration. His bar mitzvah was in grand style.

This story is still unfolding. Rabbi Fishbane is not only ecstatic to be able to put on his grandfather's tefillin again. He also feels that *Hashgachah Pratis* -- Divine Providence -- asked him to be involved in Josh's life.

In an email, Rabbi Fishbane asked Josh, "Would you like to find some time to study Torah together? "

Rabbi Fishbane shared the e-mail Josh sent in response.

*Hello, Rabbi, it is so great to hear from you! I received the e-mail and pictures!*

*Thank you so much.*

*I often think about our story. I too don't believe things happen by accident, and I don't believe in coincidences. I feel that this was meant to happen. I'm very happy it did. It gives me the feeling that I often felt as a child, the feeling that the World/Universe is a "magical" place. It is.*

Josh may not be aware that landing a weekly *chavrusa* (study partner) with Rabbi Sholem Fishbane is a bit like winning the Jewish lottery. All he knows is that G-d suggested that he take a different route on that fateful day.... And for \$20 dollars, he got himself a pair of roller skates, a gigantic mitzvah, a bar mitzvah, and a new friend.

Only G-d knows what else is to follow.

What does this story mean?

In 1937 Walt Disney released the first full-length animated movie: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Producing an animated movie was an enormous task. Disney artists drew over one million pictures. Each picture flashed onto the screen for a mere one-twenty-fourth of a second.

As viewers watched the movie run at regular speed, it seemed so simple. But they had no idea everything that went into it.

Our lives are like that movie. As our lives run at "regular speed," we have no idea how much G-d's providence, care, and love fills every single second. G-d puts infinite thought and careful attention into every detail. There is design behind the frames we don't see. And there is purpose and meaning even for the scenes that seem to make no sense. Hashem is running the entire show, and *everything* happens for a reason.

How are we to respond, then, when the inexplicable occurs?

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said, "*Life must be lived forward; it can only be understood backward.*" We rarely, if ever, fully understand the whys and wherefores of life. In the face of life's mysteries, a Jew should say *gam zu l'tova* -- "This too, is for the best."

Can something that seems bad be something good in disguise? Absolutely. It is important to train oneself to look positively upon life's situations. Often what appears as 'bad' or 'negative' ends up being a blessing. What can we do to look at challenging situations in a positive light? When things don't seem to be going your way, say *gam zu l'tova*.

Why did Rabbi Fishbane's tefillin disappear? G-d 'borrowed' Rabbi Fishbane's tefillin and put them in a Nevada garage for 12 years -- waiting for just the right time for a precious Jewish soul with an inner G-dly connection just waiting to be lit.

The word 'History' means: HIS STORY. As Josh D. said, the world is, indeed, a "magical" place.

There are no lucky numbers, coincidences, luck or chance. G-d is running the show. And when things in life don't seem to make sense, say *gam zu l'tova* -- "This too, is for the best."