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Special Help for Special Needs

by Rabbi Mendel Samuels

Our youngest son Refoel-Meir is a special-needs child. He is a very sweet boy, but due to his condition he cannot be left alone even for a minute. Every day a nurse comes to our home to assist in his care; this allows my wife to function in her many capacities as a mother for the rest of the household and as a *shlucha* (emissary of **the Lubavitcher Rebbe**).

Several years ago there were changes at our insurance. They started sending letters informing us that in their assessment, our son's condition did not meet the criteria for deserving a home nurse for 40 hours a week. These assessments were baseless and Refoel Meir's doctors wrote letters stating unequivocally that he needed the nurses desperately.

After months of warnings, on the day before Rosh Hashana we were notified that the insurance would stop paying for the nurses indefinitely. We were devastated.

Instead of a trained nurse they were willing to provide us with an aide that would come for two hours each day to be with Refoel Meir. It was difficult to find the right person for the job, but after some time we managed to find the perfect fit. Although this provided some measure of relief so my wife could catch her breath and do some basic chores each day, the new arrangement was extremely difficult for us all, especially for my wife.

After losing the much-needed funding, a representative from the appeals department was assigned to our case. She assured me on the phone that she would do everything in her power to get the nurse back to our home.

Towards the end of our conversation she asked me, "How is the *rebbetzin* doing?"

Taken aback at the unexpected use of this Yiddish term referring to the rabbi's wife, I blurted out, "Are you Jewish?"

“I can’t tell you that information over the phone,” she replied laughing. From then on this became a routine joke in our phone conversations. She would ask how “the *rebbetzin*” is doing, I would ask her if she is Jewish and she’d respond she was unable to divulge that information.

On the day before Passover she called me with the bad news that after trying everything in her power to appeal their denial of Refoel Meir’s nursing care, the final appeal had been rejected and the denial was final. We were broken by the news.

A few months later during the summer I was at the *Ohel* [burial structure of the Lubavitcher Rebbe] and as I prepared to enter, my wife called me in tears. The aide who had been coming for two hours each day for the past eight months found a better job and would not be returning henceforth. She was beside herself thinking how life would be without even this bare minimum of help.

I immediately assured her that everything will turn out for the best and asked her to write a letter to the Rebbe which I will read at the *Ohel* in a few minutes. Certainly the Rebbe will intercede that we overcome this challenge as well.

This is what she wrote:

Dear Rebbe,

Firstly, I thank the Aibershter [‘the One above’] for the privilege of being given the responsibility of caring for such a special soul. But He created me of flesh and blood and there is only so much I can do. I desperately need the nurse. I’m begging for a blessing that we should get our nurse back for 40 hours a week. I’ll take 20 hours but the truth is that we really need a nurse for 40 hours a week.

As I turned to leave after reading her letter and placing it at the *Ohel*, my phone rang.

“Hi Rabbi. How is the *rebbetzin*?”

I was shocked since I had never expected to hear from the insurance appeals department ever again.

“I never expected to hear from you,” I said.

“Neither did I, Rabbi. Tell me, what did you do?”

“That’s a loaded question. I have done a lot of things.”

“Rabbi, whom did you speak to?”

“To many people. What’s going on?”

“That’s what I am wondering as well. Listen, in all my years working at this company I have never seen this happen. I am holding a letter here stating that the company is reversing all their denials and your son will have a nurse for 40 hours a week!”

Standing near the Ohel with the phone to my ear I burst out crying and said to her, “Do you know where I am standing now? I’m standing near the resting place of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Have you heard of the Lubavitcher Rebbe?”

“Yes, Rabbi. I was there last week.”

“So you are Jewish!”

“I’m sorry I can’t tell you that over the phone.”

We were both very emotional and she started crying as well. An open miracle had just occurred in front of our eyes!

When I shared the news with my wife moments later she was in absolute disbelief, but so exhilaratingly grateful at the miraculous turn of events.

The story continues.

Although we had our funding back, finding the right nurse could be a serious challenge but I figured since we were already on a roll I would contact the nurse who had been coming up until Rosh Hashana and see if she was perhaps available to care for Refoel Meir again.

“Rabbi,” she said to me on the phone. “You are a man of faith. I knew G-d would bring me back to your family. I have been waiting by the phone all these months. I will be there on Monday.”

May Refoel Meir experience a *refuah shleimah u’krovah*.

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Source: Edited by Yerachmiel Tilles from the original article in “**A Chassidisher Derher**” (Teves 5781 / Dec. 1980). The author, Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Samuels, is a *shliach* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Simsbury, CT.

*Connection (tenuous) - Weekly Torah Reading:* In this double portion, Moses has to deal with the 'special needs' of the tribes of Reuven and Gad)