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Story #1373 (5784-30) 22 Adar Sheini 5784 (April 1, 2024)

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## FIXATED ON CHICKEN WRAPS

In the summer of 2022, one of our sons was going to an overnight camp in Canada via New York City, We had plans to drive him there--about an 8 hour trip from Chautauqua, NY, where we [**Rabbi Zalman<sup>1</sup> & Esther Vilenkin**] direct the local Chabad center—but had to reschedule when we received an update that luggage drop-off necessitated that we arrive a day earlier.

Since we had a pre-existing obligation until 2 p.m. on the afternoon of our departure, our goal was to be all packed and ready to leave immediately afterward. My husband arrived home and when he noticed that we had a lot of leftover chicken, he suggested that we make chicken wraps for everyone to eat on the way.

After a quick poll, I saw there was no interest; everyone was already set with their favored packed food. (I also noted that one of my sons was remaining at home and would figure out what to do with the chicken.) Still, for some inexplicable reason, my husband, the one who was most concerned that we leave right away, decided that he really wanted to make those chicken wraps and was certain that later the children would appreciate them. I was incredulous watching him carefully making them and proudly putting each one neatly in a plastic container. He did a great job, but now we were almost an hour behind schedule.

As we got into the car, my husband asked if I could drive as he felt exhausted. After driving an hour or so, his phone rang. Someone we didn't know was calling us and asking how far we were from Cuba, N.Y. The caller said he had searched to find the nearest Chabad and Chautauqua popped up.

My husband quickly tried searching for Cuba, a small town we had never heard of before. The caller had a sister who had just been in a car accident on the highway near Cuba, and he was looking for someone to help her.

To our amazement, Cuba was on our way; in fact, it was the very next exit—seven minutes away! This just blew our minds! We weren't late at all. Rather, our timing turned out to be perfect; we were absolutely meant to travel a day earlier, an hour later, and approach the exit where we could help a fellow Jew!

We found the woman, and I was able to drive her to Elmira,<sup>2</sup> the closest city with a proper hospital, where she could get appropriate care and evaluation. I stayed with her for a few hours until her family arrived from Cleveland.

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Shneur-Zalman Vilenkin bears the name of his illustrious grandfather (1878-1963), who was the Lubavitcher Rebbe's Torah teacher when he was a child.

<sup>2</sup> Elmira, Cuba and Chautauqua in order are due west of Binghamton, NY (where I attended university). Chautauqua is close to Lake Erie, the western border of NY state, 73 miles south of Buffalo, NY.

As her family pulled into the hospital parking lot, my husband greeted them and asked them if they had something to eat. Hospital waits are unpredictable, and there would be a return trip for them ahead with little chance of finding kosher food. The family was in such a rush to get to the hospital that food wasn't a priority. They figured they would just make do with whatever kosher items they could buy at a local gas station or grocery.

My husband went back to our car to get them food, and, of course, beaming with pleasure, gave them the chicken wraps. To me, those wraps had G-d's fingerprints! The chicken wraps didn't just affect our timing, so that we would be just seven minutes away from the site of the crash, but also provided nourishment and comfort.

A few days later, we were back in Chautauqua hosting a Friday-night Shabbat meal for a large group. The Torah portion of the week was *Matot-Massei*, recounting the journeys the Jews made in the desert during their 40 years of wandering before entering the Land of Israel. With a Torah message about journeys and the purpose of each encampment, we thought our story of Divine Providence was a perfect example and excitedly shared our experience.

The next morning, a woman came over to me, visibly moved and full of gratitude that my husband shared our story at the Shabbat meal because it meant so much to her family, especially her daughter. It so happened that the previous Sunday, she and her husband were driving to visit their nine-year-old daughter at camp on visiting day. It was the girl's first experience at an overnight camp.

Unfortunately, the parents had a flat tire that delayed them for three or four hours. Their daughter watched and waited as her bunkmates went off with their parents. They had promised her that they would visit, but hours passed and they weren't showing up. By the time they arrived, she was very emotional, upset and hurt. Even when camp ended and she was back home, it remained a sore subject that lingered in the air.

After having heard the story told by my husband at the Shabbat meal the night before, the girl told her mother, "Now I know why you came late on visiting day!" She went on to explain to her mother that her parents' delay was part of G-d's plan for her to help another person.

"You see, there was another girl in my bunk whose parents couldn't come. While you were fixing your tire, it was just the two of us, but we had each other to play with. G-d wanted my friend not to be alone and the only one without parents or visitors the whole day. For all those hours of waiting, we played together."

She recognized the bigger picture with her important role, and her resentment and hurt feelings were gone. Her mother was so proud and inspired by her daughter's perceptive and introspective reaction, and so relieved that her daughter processed this all in a manner that calmed her emotionally.

These were the events and details I felt so privileged to witness and be a part of. It seems like an “ordinary story” (no splitting of the sea or amazing phenomena), yet upon scrutiny, Divine Supervision is so evident—every piece masterfully orchestrated with precision.

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*Mrs. Vilenkin adds:*

Just as experiencing breathtaking beauty is awe-inspiring and points directly to a Creator, being fortunate to see G-d’s hand in the details of our everyday life is humbling and empowering.

Sometimes, you can gaze at an incredible scene: a clear night sky dazzling with millions of endless bright stars, an overlook at the Grand Canyon or the powerful force of Niagara Falls. The majesty of it all is so humbling, especially when considering yourself—one created being—against the scope of the whole universe in all its glory.

At the same time, the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 37B) instructs us to consider that, “For me, the world was created.” Each of us affects all of creation; the world would be incomplete without us. The Creator didn’t create spare parts; everyone is the Designer’s original with a unique purpose that cannot be duplicated.

[This report is dedicated to my dear mother, Rebbetzin Tzivya-Miriam (Gurary) bas HaRav Yizchak Hacoen, of blessed memory.]

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*Source:* Compiled and supplemented by R. Yerachmiel Tilles from the *Parshat Mattos-Massei* 5783 email of Chabad.Org, as posted on “*Shabbos Stories for the Parsha.*”

*Connection:* Weekly Torah reading of *Shemini* – eating only kosher food.