

The Little Miracles and **BIG** lessons of Purim

By: Dr. Leah Adams

Purim is a time of hidden miracles. We are told that this, in fact, is one of the lessons of Purim. The lesson that Hashem does good for us in mysterious ways and it is our job to uncover the “Nistar”. I love looking around in my daily life and uncovering these mysteries. Better than reading a good spy novel based on fictitious excitement is the thrill of discovering and revealing the wondrous secrets of Yad Hashem in our own lives. As many of you know, I run a free costume gemach. This year we’ve served about 150 families. To say that it is busy at this time of year is an understatement! I have often said to people that the stock is like Elisha’s oil, it seems to grow on its own, commensurate with the need. Well, back to our story line. . .

Put on your spyglasses and come join me as we investigate and expose the oh so obvious hand of the One Above in His dealings with the Gemach. I have many regular return “customers” who come to the Gemach. A few years ago, one such customer, who has also donated a number of costumes, decided to outfit her family as pirates. After selecting tops, pants and hats for all of the members of the family, she couldn’t decide whether to bring home pants for her husband or not. She decided against it and so, armed with her selection of red and white and black striped garments, she and her children headed home.

One day, a short time later, when I got home from work I found a large bag next to my side door. It was filled with costumes! (I thank whoever left it there, there was no note so I have no idea who the donor was.) I lugged in the bag, plopped it on my kitchen table and began to rummage through it as I turned on the answering machine to check messages. As is common for this time of year, several calls came through from hopeful costume seekers about various items that were “needed”. One of the calls was from my friend the “pirate” mommy. She lamented not having taken the adult pirate pants and was wondering if they were still available. Sadly enough, I remembered that the pants had since been taken out by another family. I do so hate to have to call people and disappoint

them but I knew I'd have to call her back. First, though, I decided, to treat myself and finish looking through the newfound bag of goodies. Sure enough, in this mysterious garbage bag, there was a pair of adult size pirate pants! What are the chances of that?! I called "Pirate" mom and told her the whole story and we both marveled at this hidden miracle.

As I mentioned, it's not unusual that people call me with requests. One day one of the neighbors around my block called me asking if I have poodle skirts. I happen to think that the look is adorable but unfortunately, I didn't have any. See what happened next. This next story really taught me not only the amazing ways that Hashem performs miracles in our daily lives, but also reminded me that I am not in charge. Schools often come to borrow costumes for their annual productions. Production season usually runs from December until right before Purim, depending on the school. The challenge for me is getting after the high school girls to return costumes before the Purim rush.

In one such case I called a girl to tell her that I would be having hours that Sunday from 12-4 and so would like the returns at 12-before the costume seekers would converge on the place. She assured me that this would not be a problem. As the day went on and the gemach became busier and busier, I was feeling a little bothered by the fact that these returns had not yet come in. By the time she arrived it was close to 4 and the place was PACKED! I was not even able to take her returns for quite a few minutes because of the amount of people who were already on line waiting to check out. When I was finally able to go through her things she explained that she had been away for Shabbos and her return had been delayed later than expected. Still a little frustrated, and disappointed that the people that came earlier did not have access to these few pieces, I certainly understood how these things happen.

So far the story seems kind of hum drum, very regular and everyday sounding. Well, here's the punchline. This girl's mother used to own a costume shop/gemach. After a few years the business became too overwhelming and so she did not reopen. After waiting on line with her daughter amongst the swarms of people looking for costumes in my basement, she said to me "I have loads of

costumes just sitting in my house. I see that here that will get a lot of use. Let me give them to you.” Within two hours of the offer she delivered, (with the help of my daughter), 4 bins of beautiful costumes! The most humbling part of this amazing, miraculous, costume donation is that here I was disappointed that the girl came so late but HKB”H had her come at the busiest time so that her mother would see the need that she could fill!

The extra clincher to this story is that among the many pieces that I sorted through in this new collection were poodle skirts. I finished unpacking the stuff around 11:30 at night and, probably due to exhaustion, I could not remember who had asked for the poodle skirts just two days prior. I asked the one daughter that was still awake if she recalled this conversation but no luck. Around midnight it struck me (don’t worry, I waited until the next morning to call my neighbor with the good news). The story gets even better. When I called the neighbor she was particularly appreciative. She explained that after having made a simcha this year, she had to be very frugal with costumes in order to stick to her budget to repay simcha loans. Being gifted with these skirts that her kids wanted just fit the bill!

Here’s another gemach story. This one reminds us of another important Purim lesson, not to despair, not to be miya’esh. Two years ago I lent out some costumes to a family that included a red wig. After Purim the woman gave the costumes to a friend who was coming anyway to return the items that she had borrowed. (I now tell people that the one who takes it out should be the one to bring it back.) When the friend came we checked in all of the items but the red wig was missing. The initial borrower was sure she had given it to her friend to return, the one who did the actually returns thought perhaps her kids had played with it or maybe it had been left in her car. Who knows? Maybe it had fallen out of the bag somewhere along the way between the three houses. Anyway, it was nowhere to be found. Weeks passed and I called both women several times but no one had seen the wig. Last week, after two years, the original borrower called me. With much humility she told me that she had found the wig in her house and now wanted to return it. She herself doesn’t know where it disappeared to and

how it resurfaced. We know it's another gemach miracle, but it certainly taught both of us to never give up hope!

Here's a final, and very important footnote, the hakoras hatov, or thank you note. The Gemach would not be possible without the patience and support of some very important players in this story. Thank you to the neighbors on Olympia who put up with the bottlenecked cars on the street. Part of the zechusim go to you. Thank you to all of you who have donated costumes. The demand is great and without a supply, the gemach wouldn't be the fun place that it is. Thank you to all of the members of my family who put up with answering the never ending phone calls, early morning until late at night. Thank you to my family whose dinner gets later and later and more sparse as I am down serving customers instead of being upstairs serving food. Thank you to my family who so graciously share all of our costumes with the world without a second thought. Thank you to my family whose homework gets more and more rushed, if done at all, and thanks to their teachers who seem to have been tolerating this. Thanks to my family whose personal issues get put on the back burner until late at night. Thanks to my husband whose wife is married to the gemach. Maybe we'll actually get to see each other at the Seudah. Thank you Hashem for the miracles that saved us on Purim and for the modern day miracles that you perform to keep Purim a happy day!

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