

A friend of mine once described herself as “a player in the Spiritual Olympics.” Many of the unbelievable women I know have positions on the team. They are all unique in style, talent and challenge, but collectively play hard and fair, focusing on the game’s message and strategy rather than its outcome. They selflessly pass the torch of growth and inspiration on to others, and are often too humble to accept their medals even following a win. One such player shared the following story with me. I believe that it is the story of a personal Purim.

After struggling with infertility for about fifteen years, Chaya (not her real name) had been through her share of treatments and their ensuing disappointments. Her expertise grew along with her frustration. She had done it all. But then a new treatment was brought to her attention. It was in the experimental phase, and a select group of women were to have the privilege of potentially benefitting from it. The ticket price was \$40,000. Chaya didn’t have that kind of money, especially after all that she had already gone through and paid for. She mentioned the treatment to a sister, more as an “isn’t this interesting” than a real possibility. After all – it didn’t offer a sure bet. And she didn’t have the money.

A few days later, she found an envelope on her kitchen table. It held \$40,000 and a note of promise and hope. Chaya was shocked. As generous as the gift was, spending that kind of donated money cannot be done without a lot of thought. It assumes a real responsibility. So Chaya went to one Rabbi...and another...and another for advice. Each gave her the same reassuring *bracha*: “You should have the procedure and there will be a *kiddush Hashem*.” How rare to find such a common voice; what clarity it offered! Her excitement knew no end. She envisioned herself and her husband basking in the wonderful news, the articles she would write to publicize their personal salvation, the *simcha* they would feel and share. She prepared and packed for the treatment, thinking out every possible detail required for her upcoming stay. Imagining the appreciation she would feel toward the members of the team in the hospital, Chaya even bought just the right number (for every member of the staff) of boxes of chocolate. It would offer a magnanimous show of gratitude for helping her achieve her life’s dream.

The women chosen for the procedure were given rooms in a beautiful Manhattan hotel overlooking Central Park. Chaya was ecstatic. She unpacked her things and lined the boxes of chocolate up on the closet shelf. She raced to the hospital for the first of what were to be three rounds of treatment. Life was beautiful.

She was called in after the first round. The technician could not look her in the eye. Apologetically, she told Chaya that the first treatment proved ineffective. Chaya would not be a candidate for success. One day and forty thousand dollars later, she was told that she could return home, without a baby and without hope.

Chaya returned to her hotel room a broken woman. She was disappointed at so many levels. One disappointment seemed outright cruel. “But they all said – they *promised!* – that there would be a *kiddush Hashem!!!*” She felt so wronged, so betrayed by Hashem and His emissaries. For the first time in her fifteen years of struggle, she actually entertained the thought of ending her life; the pavement beneath the twelve stories down was beckoning.

She pulled herself together, determined to go home, but fell apart all over again when she went to the closet to pack her things. *The chocolates*. They mocked her and mocked her

well-intentioned efforts and belief. The pain was just too intense. And then she replayed the words of her greats.

They all said that there would be a *kiddush Hashem*. She assumed that it would be the long awaited pregnancy, attesting to Hashem's power and ability. But maybe not.

Chaya brought the boxes of chocolate over to the hospital and asked to see the members of the fertility clinic's team. They were puzzled and congregated in the meeting room, prepared for the angry, emotional reaction they had absorbed from other disappointed patients over the years.

Chaya smiled. "I know that you all tried your best to help me. You giving me the chance you did means so much to me. I wanted to give you all something as a token of my appreciation for all that you did and for the amazing work that you do." All in presence were dumbfounded, tearfully and gratefully accepting their boxes of chocolate.

Chaya concludes her story with, "The *rabbonim* were right. There **was** a *kiddush Hashem* that day. I made it."

We each have our own *Megillas Esther* to write. We have the opportunity at every turn in life to be *megaleh* our *hester*, to reveal our hidden strengths and potential. When Hashem doesn't clearly reveal Himself to us, we have the chance to reveal ourselves and our belief to Him, crystallizing the greatness which otherwise may have remained dormant.

Esther is known as the heroine of Purim, responsible for the redemption we celebrate.

Can we truly say that the Jews of Persia, still in *galus* at the end of the *megilla*, experienced true redemption? More so – can we say that *Esther* was redeemed? After all, following their victory she remained in the palace of a monster, mother to his child.

There is a *geula* which Hashem can and will provide. And there is one which we can bring upon ourselves. It is the redemption which comes from the recognition of the powers we have to bring *kiddush Hashem* to the world as the result of our most powerful perception: the perception of G-d's goodness and our ability to emulate and connect to Him, to see our world through His eyes. That is our deepest, life-altering strength. It is when we are *megaleh* that *hester* that we write the scroll of our own life's pride, our dignity and self-worth; it is proof of our being in control not over our lives but over how we choose to define them. It is when we embrace our own life, struggles and all, as offering us our greatest opportunity to shine.

That is the torch of the Spiritual Olympic game we call "Life." It is the light which the players in *Shushan* experienced through Esther's illumination, the *orah* which yields the truest medals of *simcha*, *sasson*, *v'yikar*.

It is the light that my noble friend Chaya enjoys, she along with her brave husband and their three special *neshamos* who, like Queen Esther, know the love of their adoptive parents.

It will be a joyous Purim. For we will make it so.