

FROM THE RABBI

Coincidence?

My first trip to Israel was in 1982 when I spent the summer studying at an Orthodox women's yeshiva, Michlelet Bruria. I still recall one of our teachers who was teaching us about *hash'gacha pratit—Divine providence*. Daily he would repeat, "There is no such thing as coincidence." It was for me a fascinating and challenging experience. Being a rationalist, I was not really convinced. With all the tragedies and awful things that happen in the world, how could there be Divine providence but not intervention?

Still, there have been times in my own life, seemingly amazing coincidences, that have left me wondering if I was missing something. It led me to a more complex theological perspective. Perhaps we are too often—or maybe even always for some of us—missing the presence of the Divine in our everyday lives. That lack of spiritual awareness leaves us missing Divine Presence and all it offers us for good. That would explain why we humans are so messy in our lives.

So why am I waxing theological in this space at this time? Well, I recently had a couple of extraordinary experiences that I would love to share with you.

My son Judah and his beloved Tamar got engaged this past winter and we just celebrated with Tamar's family at the engagement party that her parents threw for our families. OK – first thing – if you have not read the biblical story of Judah and Tamar in the book of Genesis, [click here](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/judah-and-tamar-writing-the-story/).
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While the bride and groom met online without help from parents (heaven forbid!)—it turns out that I know Tamar's family. Her uncle and I worked closely together for several years when I was in New Jersey. I have been to simchas and shiva at her uncle's house and synagogue.
Hashgacha pratit—Divine providence.

Then, at the engagement party it got really interesting. I saw a woman facing me as I walked through the kitchen and thought, "I know her, but I can't figure out who she is." She came right up to me and said, "I know you, but I can't figure out who you are." In the course of back and forth 'Jewish geography' we discovered that we lived in the same neighborhood in Philadelphia (where my family settled when I was 7 years old) when we were kids. We went to the same synagogue. We discovered that we are the same age and were in the same third grade Hebrew School class—we both recalled our teacher who taught us to read Hebrew. She was stern, but we loved her.

It didn't stop there—our families both moved from that neighborhood at the same time, settling in nearby suburbs. We both went to Gratz College (Philly's Hebrew teacher's college) for Hebrew High School. We both skipped our senior year of high school and went to Temple University Ambler Campus. The Temple Ambler campus is a small, suburban campus—the kind of place where most of the Jewish kids knew each other.

She asked me if I visit Israel. Yes, of course I do. She said he does too, and she hangs out in Jerusalem where her family has an apartment. What neighborhood? The German Colony—which, of course is where I hang out—it is where the Hartman Institute is located. Except for

pandemic time, I have spent many, many wonderful days and weeks at the Hartman campus. Her apartment is a few blocks from Hartman, on a street where I walk several times a day when I am studying at Hartman, and where I will be this July.

“Do you ever attend the women’s prayers at the *Kotel* (the Western Wall)?” she asked. Many of you know that I have been active with *Women of the Wall* for many years now and I attend their *Rosh Chodesh* (first day of the New Month) services when I am in town. My new/old friend does too.

We plan to meet up when I am in Jerusalem in July. Maybe then we can trace our shared experiences to fill the story in.

Hashgachah pratit. Noticing the extraordinary—this is a spiritual discipline. Then interpreting these “coincidental” experiences—that is a spiritual task. It takes openness and curiosity and eyes wide open. These disciplines are the gifts of a spiritual life—if only we stop to be aware and to notice.

Let’s share our stories of experiences that some would say are *not coincidences* and together, uncover their spiritual messages for our lives.

~ Rabbi Amy Small
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