



Bundle of Joy

By: Yehudis E. Lieber

I was in 12th grade when my classmate Rivka's mother gave birth to a baby girl with Down syndrome. Her family was taking it really well, or so everyone was saying, but I was not. What was going through my mind was this: I don't know why she's being all tzaddeikesy about this; if I was in her place, I'd be throwing a fit — figuratively, at least. Having a baby sister with Down syndrome seemed downright sad — devastating, even — and I felt that Rivka had every right to be miserable instead of riding on this emunah cloud she was on.

Not that something like this would ever happen to me; my family was just totally not the special-needs-sibling type. But, a mere three days later, it did. Strangely enough, though, I felt none of the self-righteous misery I thought I would feel when it was my anticipated sibling who turned out...different than expected. And when I looked to my parents, could it be that it was they who were now riding the emunah cloud and pulling me right along with them? Challenges can be funny things — unpredictable things — sometimes. Happy occasions can, at times, be replete with bumps along the way that blindside us, sucking the joy out of the awaited event, while circumstances we expected to be sad can turn out...not really sad at all. The initial shock, even the pain, wore off quickly, and we all fell in love with our tiny precious bundle. It was ironic that though so many people were concerned with how my very young

siblings would take it — Did you tell them anything? Do they realize that something is amiss? — they took things completely in stride. So much so that we overheard my sister Tzippy, who was 5 at the time, telling someone, “The only thing I'm Downs in is that I can't say the 'r' sound properly.” My mother had explained to her that having Down syndrome meant that our new baby wouldn't be able to do some things that other people can. Well, thought Tzippy, don't we all have something that we can't do the way other people can? What else is new?

Seventeen years later, when I look back at that time, the main thing I remember is the joy. Is it because, beneath it all, every new neshamah that comes down into this world brings with it joy, especially a neshamah as holy and pure as this one? Is it because there is nothing quite like the feeling of being showered by an outpouring of care from everyone around you — friends, neighbors, relatives? Is it because, as Rabbi Akiva Tatz explains, there is tremendous pleasure in feeling emotion, any emotion, and even sorrow has a grain of ecstasy in it? Is it because the closeness — to my family, to Hashem — that this experience engendered made this such a beautiful time for us? You know what I think? I think it was because of all of the above — and more.

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