

My friends, this Shabbat we read the Torah portion B'ha'alot'cha during services tomorrow. This is a special Shabbat for me. It was on the week we read B'ha'alot'cha from the Torah that I was ordained as a rabbi. When I first inquired about rabbinical school, I was told I would be able to get it because I did not have a day school education, and yet here I am. And so, I thought it would be appropriate to take a moment tonight to reflect and be thankful that we are not particularly lucky people.

This idea came to me when I did something out of character and bought a lottery ticket. Today, I was getting gas for my car and I scanned the ticket to see if it was a winner. Guess what? It was. I'm still trying to decide if I should tell Arlene or just keep the four dollars to myself.

Although I tell myself that my marriage and I could handle winning \$900 million, and I think that is true, it seems like winning a big lottery jackpot is a pretty good recipe for divorce and misery down the road. When B.B. King sings, "If it weren't for bad luck, I wouldn't have no luck at all," he probably doesn't realize that you're probably better off with no luck at all, because what seems like good luck all too often leads to bad things.

At this point, let me clarify something. I hope it goes without saying that I do not mean you are better off with a life filled with tragedy than blessing. Of course not. And I wish someone "Good luck" just like everyone else does, but when we do, most of the time we are wishing the person success. And virtually all the time, success comes from hard work, not good luck.

Who are the ones most often considered the lucky ones in America? The rich and famous, the Hollywood elite. And some are quite fortunate and lead admirable lives. But others can't seem to remember that Coke is supposed to be a carbonated beverage, that marriage is not a game of whomever does it the most times wins, and that children are little human beings who did not ask to be born into a life in front of paparazzi.

The Talmud debates and ultimately rejects the idea of luck as a force that acts on the universe: "R. Hanina said, 'The planetary influence gives wisdom, the planetary influence gives wealth, and Israel stands under planetary influence.' R. Johanan said that Israel is immune. Rav too agrees. For Rav, Judah said in Rav's name, 'How do we know that Israel is immune from planetary influence?.... Because Avraham said, 'Master of the Universe! I have looked at my constellation and find that I am not fated to have a child.' The Almighty replied, 'Leave your planets alone, for Israel is free from such influence.'" R. Akiva also says that Israel is free from planetary influence." (Shabbat 156a and b)

On the other hand, a Jew known for something other than his Talmudic scholarship has some great wisdom to share with us on this matter. Sam Goldwyn famously said, "The harder I work, the luckier I get." If I had counted on a lucky break to get into rabbinical school, I do not know where I would be today. But when I was told I needed a day school education, I started my Bachelor's Degree almost from scratch because most of my credits were in music, worked hard for two and one half years, including summers, and passed the entrance exams into rabbinical school. Twenty-one years later, I am very glad I didn't see myself as a lucky

May 24, 2013

If It Weren't For Bad Luck,
Wouldn't Have No Luck At All (Thank God)

Rabbi Benjamin Sendrow

person. Sam Goldwyn had it right. The harder I worked, the luckier I got, and it is as true today as it ever was.