

JEWISH LATIN PRINCESS

MIRIAM BALLIN, HATZALAH'S WONDER WOMAN

EPISODE 40

You're listening to Jewish Latin Princess Podcast by Yael. Every week get your dose of inspiration from the world's most uniquely talented Jewish women and from Yael herself. Seeking profound and practical ways to live a joyful, richer Jewish life? Welcome to Jewish Latin Princess Podcast.

And now, Jewish lifestyle expert and bilingual blogger at www.jewishlatinprincess.com, your host, Yael.

Yael Trusch: Would you be able to be on call at all hours of the day to save a life? All while you raise a family and have a career as a family therapist? You're listening to Jewish Latin Princess. Everyone, I'm your host, Yael Trusch. Welcome to the show. My guest today has been called Hatzalah's Wonder Woman. Miriam Ballin is on the show. Miriam, an American now living in Israel, is the Founder and National Director of Hatzalah's Psychotrauma and Crisis Response Unit.

She has been a Hatzalah medic for nearly five years and has won the Outstanding Medic Award in Hatzalah two years in a row, the first woman to achieve this. The Talmud teaches, "He who saves a life saves the world." And my guest today has taken this to heart. Applying it every single day.

Where does Miriam draw strength from whenever she wonders if the work is too much for her shoulders? What is family like for Miriam as a Hatzalah medic and as the wife of a Hatzalah medic? Yes! It's a husband and wife team. Why psychotrauma and crisis response? And what is Miriam's unit doing that is revolutionizing EMT care in Israel? This and more in the most powerful interview with Hatzalah's Wonder Woman, Miriam Ballin.

[Theme Music]

Yael Trusch: Miriam Ballin, Hatzalah's Wonder Woman, welcome to Jewish Latin Princess.

Miriam Ballin: Thank you for having me.

Yael Trusch: I am so thrilled to have you on the show. First of all, I want to tell you I feel like we were meant to cross paths at some point. You grew up in Houston till age twelve. I live in Houston now. And then recently I discovered that you live or you cover the Rachaviar/Shaarei Chesed neighborhood, is that correct? In Israel?

Miriam Ballin: That's correct.

Yael Trusch: And that's where I used to live with my husband, so I don't know! I think we are meant to intersect at some point in our lives, and here we are.

Miriam Ballin: That's so funny! Destined.

Yael Trusch: Mm-hm! I want to brag, I want to brag about you a little bit, Miriam. You're the Founder and the National Director of the United Hatzalah Psychotrauma and Crisis Response Unit. You won the outstanding Medic Award in Hatzalah two years in a row, the first woman to achieve this. The first time you were recognized for the number of responses, over a hundred in your neighborhood alone, and the second time for response time which is under two minutes. And of course now you founded and you're directing Hatzalah's Psychotrauma and Crisis Response Unit. Before we get to what that means, take us back in time, Miriam, how did it all start and why did you feel the calling to be involved with Hatzalah in the first place?

Miriam Ballin: Well, my husband and I had been living in Sydney where he's from in Australia. And he was in medical school doing his thing and then on the side he joined the Hatzalah in Sydney to be able to be a medic there and he was going at the calls and he was coming back each time with this look on his face, with this twinkle on his eyes is like satisfaction and excitement after he could get to save a life and after awhile it was something that I really started to want to be a part of. Any special organization I really want to be part of that organization as a medic as well but like many other Jewish organizations, Hatzalah organizations, they, at that point we're not having women as active medic, but they did allow me to become a dispatcher. So I started dispatching for the organization and it was really exciting to get to get a call and to send people out and know that I made the differences in helping to get the right people there quickly but it wasn't the same as to be an active medic. When we made our dream come true of moving to Israel and making our career, the first thing that my husband did was join Hatzalah here, United Hatzalah, and then I asked if I could join as well. And they said, yes, of course.

Yael Trusch: And there you trained then they will allow you to train as a medic in Israel.

MIRIAM BALLIN: That's right. I did a six months course for three times a week. It was quite a big investment and it was all in Hebrew and it's just came to Israel so it took a lot of time of doing Google translate in all the stuff that I was learning.

Yael Trusch: And that was how long ago, Miriam?

MIRIAM BALLIN: That was about four and a half years ago.

Yael Trusch: Okay, so four—

MIRIAM BALLIN: And I just had a baby. I had this little tiny baby next to me like I was rocking and while I was learning and I was trying to do everything all at once but I was really determined to make it work.

Yael Trusch: So, okay. Was that your first child?

MIRIAM BALLIN: No. That was my fourth.

Yael Trusch: Okay. So all of this is going on while you've been raising four kids, kind of hard?

MIRIAM BALLIN: That's right. Now I have five.

Yael Trusch: Now you have five kids and you have a day job, as a family therapist, is that correct?

MIRIAM BALLIN: That's right. I see clients.

Yael Trusch: Okay. Before we even get to your current work with Hatzalah, can you tell us like how does it work practically with family life? You both are medics for Hatzalah, you're raising a family, you have a day job, I mean what are the challenges involved practically speaking?

MIRIAM BALLIN: So there are challenges involved. I can't say I'm an expert but I'm trying to do the absolute best that I can. Number one, I try to convey to my children that they are the absolutely most important thing in my life. Even more important than the work we do, the volunteer work that we do. We obviously would never go out in a call together unless we had somebody like our own parents or other family members watching our children. That rarely occur, but sometimes it does. But what we did do is we go in the evenings when our kids are asleep, we go on date night and instead of going to a restaurant or something, we would get on the jeep and we go around Jerusalem and whenever calls come in we're there, we're helping. But in the afternoon I try to turn my phone off from like two to six and I tell them that it's mommy time and it's funny if they heard a radio go off, they're like, oh? Mommy time because it's two to six.

Yael Trusch: Ah...

Miriam Ballin: So they know, and I know and we try very, very hard. The Dispatch Center has a secret number that they can reach me on if there is something that's big like really catastrophic happening like a terrorist attack or something. And then I get the call through like that and I don't have to actually be listening to the phone the whole afternoon that I spend the time with them.

Yael Trusch: Right. Is there a—

Miriam Ballin: I can say though that they definitely, they appreciate what we do and we try to present them on a very basic level with what we do and how we helped others so that they can appreciate it. I could just tell you a small story that once I wanted to leave because I knew that there was a CPR taking place right across the street from me and I asked my daughter who is now eight, I asked her if it's okay if I go for a few minutes and she said, no, I don't want you to go. I said, but you can sit here with Grandma, she's here, and she said, no, I don't want you to go. I said, you know what, if you don't want me to go I'm not going anywhere. And then she'd looked at me, she stopped for a moment, she thought, and she said, you know what? I'll let you go. I said, really? Okay. So I left, I came back after we actually had a successful CPR, we had given the first two shocks and when I came back I spoke to her, you know, he's not going to go into detail. I told her, you know you gave me the chance to really help somebody and you could see in her eyes that she felt that she had been an active part of doing that and helping after that and it means a lot to her and it was something that you know, I think makes her very proud of what we do.

Yael Trusch: Wow, that's so beautiful. I can't even imagine what dinner table conversations are like in your home.

Miriam Ballin: We work really hard to talk about normal everyday things and not all the crazy things that we encounter in the field.

Yael Trusch: Wait, did you say before that sometimes you'll go out on a date with your husband and the date turns into Hatzalah calls?

Miriam Ballin: Yes, we actually had a really crazy one the other week. We were going out together. And we were heading through a Ramat Eschcol to go to their waffle bar and all of a sudden a call came in for Shimon Hatzadic Street which is actually part of the Arab Sector so we went into the Arab Sector together and we were there and there was this little Arab woman like waving her arms in the middle of the street like waving us in to the home. We come in and like the entire extended Arab family is all there beside the grandmother who unfortunately had not woken up from her nap and we started CPR. My husband, as a doctor, can intubate and provide drugs and I was doing

compressions and we were really trying to get things underway and then all these other medics joined us. They had like a Chassidish one from Meah Shaarim join us and an Arab from East Jerusalem joined us and then an Armenian volunteer from the Old City, and literally we're like this huge mix of just all these people in that room trying to save this woman's life. We actually got her, we got her pulse back afterwards but it was amazing to see the appreciation that her family had and they came up to me and were excited by the fact that we had succeeded and they we're just like beside themselves with emotion and you could see that there were people who may have perceived us in a certain way up until now, myself, Orthodox Jew, Jews, the people of Israel, Israel, whatever it may be, and we definitely made a very big change in their outlook that night.

Yael Trusch: Wow. What a powerful, powerful story. That is incredible. Miriam.

Miriam Ballin: Yeah?

Yael Trusch: Psychotrauma Crisis Response. Why? Why did you choose to spearhead this? What was going on that you felt this is something I need to take on?

Miriam Ballin: So in general PTSD became very hot topic especially in America. People are talking about it. A lot of emergency workers are starting to think about their own trauma and how they're affected by it. So it kind of made up my mind, I work with people with PTSD. I see it on a regular basis but what actually happened was after I finished my Medic Course, about a year of going on calls and I was really enjoying my work as a medic, and one day when I was running to get my kids I decide to cross the street but I didn't know that the car that stopped that allowed me to cross is there was actually a motorcycle directly behind him who tried to bypass it and smashed into me.

Yael Trusch: Whoa!

Miriam Ballin: I went flying in the air, landed on the floor on Rechov Aza and it is a very narrow street, it was raining like crazy.

Yael Trusch: What?

Miriam Ballin: And it was also during the time of deliberate run over attacks, so people like jumped on the driver assuming he was a terrorist. It was huge thing shall we say. They took me to the hospital after we waited like 35 minutes for an ambulance and I was being treated by the guys that I usually treat other people with who arrived direct like two minutes and they bring me back afterwards. I'm just bumped and bruised; all my tests came out okay. I'm just shaken up emotionally really and I totally had been... I want to go back then and I want to say thank you to those people because all these people came out; store shop keepers, neighbors, witnesses, everybody trying to take care of me in whatever way they can.

And I went back and I found something so disturbing that they were so traumatized at what they had seen. And I was amazed by it because I was okay, I am standing here and speaking to them, and in my mind it's like a seemingly minor trauma, because it wasn't one of the bad outcomes, unfortunate outcomes that we see on a regular basis. It was really an okay story in the end. Perfectly fine outcome but even that trauma was very significant for them and then it just dawned on me, what if we could have a team that didn't just provide medical attention that actually provided emotional and psychological stabilization on the scene of these accidents because my story was okay but there's so many stories that leave people traumatized for years. And trauma is so debilitating.

If we can have a team that actually knew what to say, and knew what to do instead of people just trying to say the right things. I know here in Israel they all say, don't worry everything's fine. Everything is okay, nothing happened. Calm down, ma'am. Stop crying; and actually said the things that would be helpful. I thought like that would possibly minimize their chances later on of developing PTSD and would set them up for success and stability to return to their routine.

Yael Trusch: Hm. How long ago did this unit start?

Miriam Ballin: Two years ago. I started working with Avi Stainheart, the Social Worker from Rechavia as well. Also a Paramedic, Yitzi Rabinowitz also from the neighborhood here, who is also a psychologist and we basically got together and we got the organized group of psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists from all over, who would take a course in Psychological First Aide, which is by the way like a totally well-known and used protocol around the world that was developed by the World Health Organization but the difference is that most of the people using it were using it in like days to weeks after a traumatic incident and we are going to be taking it and using it in the moment following a traumatic incident.

Yael Trusch: Wow.

Miriam Ballin: In Israel they take post-trauma, you treat post-trauma, but we don't treat post-trauma we treat trauma. Acute stress reaction because it's like happening right now right here. It's not post the trauma. So that's really different from the uniqueness of what we do. And additionally, we're not doing it just with major incidents like a natural disasters and terror attacks, we do that as well, but we're also going into people's private homes, their very intimate situations like a bit of case of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or any sudden deaths, or suicide, where there we look at people, we're doing whatever we can to be able to build a safe place for them to feel what their feeling, to try and educate them about what they're feeling, to set them up to success

with the resources they need if later on they're not feeling better but rather worse than—
Yes?

Yael Trusch: And I have to ask, as this being part of Hatzalah, it's also free to the public, correct?

Miriam Ballin: Of course. We have never and will never try to anybody, for our services.

Yael Trusch: Wow, this is really incredible. Is this something that you think is going to trickle to other Hatzalah's around the world? Or is this just, you know?

Miriam Ballin: I really hope so. We just presented it to the First International Hatzalah Conference in South Africa where representatives from Hatzalah's all over the world were there. They presented the idea in front of them and they were very well received. They were very amazed by the idea and they definitely are considering how they can apply the model to their own local Hatzalah's. There are two additional things that we did do. After we trained our team of psychological experts in psychology, to be able to go out to do calls, we decided that we need to train our medics as well, so we've given the option to our 3500 medics to be able to take the course in psychological first aid because what we found was that they were suffering so much by being at the call and not knowing what to say or do. It was awkward for them. They would run away. They would take their bag after an unsuccessful CPR on a baby and they would like throw it in the car and just get out of there. It was too much for them to see the mother crying.

Yael Trusch: Right.

Miriam Ballin: So what we've done now is empowered them with the tools to be able to help her and support her and stabilize her through the trauma and that empowers them and that gives them a whole other level of care to be able to provide. In the last thing that we did was we organized a clinic and a hot line for our medics that they are able to reach out for help whether they have PTSD for 35 years or they just, yesterday they had a really difficult call. They can reach us, they can speak to somebody who knows what they are talking about that can really help them and assist them and if they need be they can organize follow up care later on.

Yael Trusch: Wow. Miriam, has there been something in your education or your upbringing that you think has granted you the mental and emotional fortitude to do this kind of work day in and day out?

Miriam Ballin: In my education? I mean I was very lucky to have gone to many different schools. And each school had like a unique thing that they taught me.

Something that I came out with and has definitely contributed to me being able to be here right now. One of the things that I think really gave me a lot of strength was directly when I moved to Israel. Right after I moved to Israel we learned that we're in the same building with Yemima Mizrachi.

Yael Trusch: Wow!

Miriam Ballin: Really a powerhouse of a woman.

Yael Trusch: Yes. I'm able to... and I love—

Miriam Ballin: And she and I became really close and when I was able to see her in her day to day life, making a difference and doing so much not just for Jews, but for the entire State of Israel. It was something that's very much inspired me to take all which I have learned and to apply it to being able to be the best and be helpful and make a kiddush Hashem. I think the Jewish education system, you need the right school to understand your strengths and how you can contribute. You just sometimes need a little bit of a kick to actually get your idea off the road. And I do believe that women have amazing ability to perceive and understand needs in different areas and to be able to fill the gap together with *siyata de shmaya*, with God giving them, blessing them with what they do. They are able to really accomplish incredible things. I see them on a day to day basis, so many women who you don't even know that who are doing unbelievable things. I feel small next to many of them.

Yael Trusch: Yes. And we do have the tool box. We just have to open it, push yourselves to open it and then utilize it, right?

Miriam Ballin: Yes

Yael Trusch: Yeah. I want to tell you, Yemima Mizrachi was my ULPAN teacher we also were neighbors, because I lived in that neighborhood and many, many years ago, when she was practicing as a lawyer, she was also an ULPAN teacher. So she was my first Hebrew teacher in Israel.

Miriam Ballin: That's so funny.

Yael Trusch: It is amazing. And we had a such a cute relationship because I was a new bride and sometimes we'd bumped into each other as we were walking toward... to school so we would walk together so I have very fond memories of that brief relationship with her. Miriam, no doubt you've seen miracles. You have already told us this one very powerful story about the Arab family and how much they appreciate it. They appreciated your work and all of the other medic's works and the diversity of the people that we're

present in the room, but you've also probably seen many miracles. Can you tell me some of the most memorable stories?

MIRIAM BALLIN: Yeah, sure. We actually had a story not long ago were my husband and I were doing one of our date night outings and we were going around Jerusalem. And they said that in Binyan Neuman in the huge theater, there was actually somebody totally unconscious. So it really is a mess over there because it's an enormous building and you could park at one end of the building and then the patient would be all the way on the other side of the building or the opposite, so it's really luck you know? So we pulled up at the side of the building and I remember saying to my husband that I hope we're on the right side. And we went inside and we literally right there, we found the man and we're treating this man who is actually semi-conscious but in a very bad way and deteriorating right in front of our eyes.

Yael Trusch: Wow.

MIRIAM BALLIN: And when we looked at him we realized we know him. And we looked again and it's our neighbor from our own building. And I said to him, Mr. Stoker are you okay? And he obviously isn't able to listen but what I do remember is Mr. Stoker goes everywhere with his wife. Every time I see him he is together with his wife so I found it strange that I couldn't find his wife anywhere near him and then it dawned on me that he was probably, he had left in a different direction while she's still sitting happily watching the orchestra and has no idea what's happening.

So my husband started to treat him and they actually had to put on an external pacemaker to be able to help his heart because it was totally not beating regularly at that point. I went in to go look for his wife, I brought her out obviously broke it to her very slowly and calmly that he's not in a good place right now that we need to get him straight to the hospital. I took her there. We got him to the hospital quickly like really, I think very, very professional treatment from my husband and from the other medics that were present and then we went back to our house.

We just hoped for the best. And it was amazing because just a week later he came back home and he gave us, you know, my husband a big hug, his wife, me a big hug. Now we see them every single day. We go on a little morning walk down the block and every time we see them it's just amazing because the last time we saw him it was like he was not himself, he was in a puddle of blood, he had hit his head we just... it looks really, really bad. And to see him with his wife walking around is like super fulfilling.

Yael Trusch: Wow, that is *Hashgacha Pratis* at its best right there. I mean, that's like *mamash* from God, that it was you and your husband who were handpicked to take care of this man, who knew, the wife knew and knew how to handle this personally.

MIRIAM BALLIN: And like from a trauma perspective like imagine I hadn't thought about his wife and they had just taken him to the hospital and she's just right there watching the orchestra for like another hour and then had no idea what was going on. I mean it would have been horrible. I'm so happy that we were able to get there and identify her and help out. Yet another amazing story just recently that refers to that United Hatzalah Conference with a two year old that on the first day of Sukkot had gone out of the Sukkah and was playing in a little pond in the front. He actually fell in the little pond and he drowned in the little pond and the people in the Sukkah realized that he was missing and they went searching for him and they found this lifeless little boy in the pond and they brought him back and they trying to... everyone was trying to help and then some way they called Hatzalah right away. The United Hatzalah Medic doctors literally 90 seconds and started CPR on him. My husband arrived much later as a physician coming from the other side of town but he made sure that he's getting the right treatment. He took the wife to the hospital, stayed there actually the whole entire day of Sukkot to be able to help them and explain to them the process, what's going on because they are not familiar with the medical system here and at the end, this kid, the next day was walking around totally fine when the day before he had no pulse, so that was really very, very touching for us.

Yael Trusch: Wow. That is amazing! One that is just absolutely amazing. Miriam, we don't have Hatzalah in Houston and we often talk about like how come we don't have it. Hatzalah really fills a critical need, the gap between the emergency incident and the time that the ambulance gets there or 911 or whoever.

MIRIAM BALLIN: Exactly.

Yael Trusch: What do you think needs to happen for communities? I'm not saying Houston in particular but just in general? That what do we need to do to in general to make Hatzalah happen?

MIRIAM BALLIN: So it's so important to have community based responders that are trained. It is so important. In every city that decides to do it with whatever regulations and laws is they're able to use and utilize to be able to set it up. But sometimes there are different complications and I understand that but in my opinion, you are able to train and give people first aid courses in any community regardless of laws and regulations so at very least they should be training all the time the people within the community learning how to save a life. If they just so happen to be next to somebody who needs their help.

At very most, to take the model, and try to apply as best as they possibly can whether it's getting your own ambulances, whether it's not getting the ambulances or just having people use their private cars. Whether it's having radios or having an application or

having a some sort of system in which people who are trained to help will know about the call going on and can get there because that's how United Hatzalah started with our President Eli Bier, who was going on the back of ambulances for like a whole year and never actually got the chance to save a life because the ambulance just gets there too late.

At one of the calls where he was, a two year old had choked and died and at the end of the call a doctor from across the street walks over and says can I help? And they say, you were a doctor across the street this whole time? And he couldn't even come because he didn't know about the call. It's an unbelievable thing to think of that just having the knowledge and information is what gives us the authority to save a life.

Yael Trusch: Wow.

Miriam Ballin: So, everyone should apply it in their community as best as they possibly can. Push for it, raise funds for it, there's nothing like supporting a Hatzalah. Everybody always supports Hatzalah after somebody saves their family member's life. People have supported Hatzalah before that. Who else would be helpful?

Yael Trusch: Wow! Yeah! This needs to be... definitely a priority in every community. And by the way I should just clarify, Hatzalah is there to help anybody. It's not just people in the Jewish community, correct?

Miriam Ballin: One hundred percent! I mean, here in Israel we are super diverse and I'm so proud of how far we've reached. We have Druze, Ethiopians, Christian, Arab, Jews; all volunteering. All saving lives on a day to day basis obviously also treating everybody and anybody that asks for help or needs the help.

Yael Trusch: Beautiful.

Miriam Ballin: Yeah. I'm very moved by that.

Yael Trusch: Miriam, has there even been a point where you've doubted, where you felt this is too much to handle. My shoulders are not broad enough. Did it ever come to that?

Miriam Ballin: You know you have a lot of unfortunate things that you're faced with like calls that didn't turn out the way you wanted to and sometimes you see things that the average women in her 30s is not supposed to see or know about even and when you got presented with those unfortunate things sometimes you say, well, am I excluding myself too much and is this going to take a toll on me later on? Is this something that I should be exposing myself? You get a lot of... you know you come up with a lot of questions and you reassess and when you reassess I think it's always good

to seek the outside people to get instructions from those that are wiser than you. To be able to obviously speak to a Rav, to be able to get his blessings; and that's what I do when things are hard for me. I reach out, I speak to people. I try to reassess and I try to make a decision but on important decisions on what I think is appropriate and healthy for me and thank God, the hard times of having haven't affected my abilities to contribute; if anything I feel like the hard times have given me more strength to be able to do more.

Yael Trusch: Wow! Miriam, you fought innovation to EMS as a woman and as an observant woman, in Israel they would call you, Haredi, right? And it's such a polarized country when it comes to religion and so what has been the reception like? This Haredi woman is turning this organization upside down for the good, I'm sure everybody recognizes that but what's been like?

Miriam Ballin: It's still interesting. It's been very, very interesting. I find that often when I speak to people on the phone or when I do an interview or we write an article, or you put together paper about the different work that we're doing... at the end, people kind of ask me a little about me just out of courtesy, and when I tell them oh, I live in Jerusalem. I'm a religious woman, and they learned a little bit about me they are usually surprised, which still surprises me because like I said before in the other question that we answered there's so many woman doing so many amazing things and so many Haredi woman doing so many amazing things.

Alternatively, there are so many times where I meet people and they look at me on the face and they see that I'm dressed modestly and I'm wearing a wig, it doesn't you know, they don't even blink. So there are people who are able to just look right past that and say, wow, great work. You're doing an amazing job, and that also gives me a very warm and fuzzy inside that we are able to achieve in the eyes of these people the same as anybody else. But when they had this article come out during that time of the hurricane in Houston, it was interesting to me that after giving an entire interview on my team and what my team was going out to do, the caption on the newspaper was, Haredi woman heads to Houston to help out. And I guess it's something that is interesting for people. I hope and pray that I'm able to be just one, a representative of the many amazing Haredi woman that are doing work, good work and showing the world that we're capable.

Yael Trusch: Wow! What a kiddush Hashem It's so beautiful. It's so, so beautiful.

Miriam Ballin: Thank you.

Yael Trusch: Miriam, I mean, all throughout I'm thinking, wow, like do you ever... no seriously, do you ever sleep?

MIRIAM BALLIN: Not really. We really actually don't sleep a lot. We have to work on that. It's tempting for us you know because when our kids are asleep, so that's the time we have a bit of quiet and we get to do like all these crazy things that we can change the world and we can like move mountains in trying to achieve different things and thank God, we do a lot of productive things throughout the night out. We really don't sleep a lot but I think we are managing just fine with our sleep level for the time being but it should probably, probably be adjusted to a healthier sleep schedule at some point.

Yael Trusch: There's always room for improvement, right? Miriam, let's do some JLP fill in the blanks. And this is the part of the show where I give an open ended statement and you fill it with whatever first thing that comes to mind, okay?

MIRIAM BALLIN: Okay.

Yael Trusch: Alright! I'm Miriam Ballin, and I feel most spiritual when?

MIRIAM BALLIN: When I'm able to go to the Kotel.

Yael Trusch: Wow! So—

MIRIAM BALLIN: I moved here in Israel because, I know it sounds cliché, but I moved here to get to be at all the holy places in this country, and when you move to a place and you're close to all these spiritual places, somehow, you never get to them, and sometimes I have asked myself like I'm living here, and I never get to these places. And the people that are coming to tour Israel find themselves there more often. So I now make the time and I make the allotted amount of time to go to whether it be the the Kotel, Kever Rachel other places where I can actually just connect with my own self, my own spirit, my own spirituality. My own deepest mind and getting to be one with myself and I do that there, at the Kotel because I do live down the block from it and I should take advantage of it and I should make the most of it.

Yael Trusch: That is so important, what you said, and I guess I never thought about it. Yes, you're right. You think you move to to Israel and it's all there so you're going to be going all the time. But no, you have a life, too. So if you don't make the time then you're not going to be taking advantage of these opportunities to connect spiritually at those very holy places that is just right there waiting for you, right?

MIRIAM BALLIN: That's right, exactly. And like my kids even love going to the Kotel it's like their favorite activity to go there and so we get pizza on the way and then we go to the Kotel and *daven* and we say *Tehillim* and we daven for all the people that we know need a little bit of help or a lot of bit of help and then we come home and that place is so exciting for them. Instead of going to Chucky Cheese, they just want to go to the Kotel and I forget to appreciate how unique that is. And I try—

Yael Trusch: Oh, my gosh! It's something—

Miriam Ballin: To keep that excitement.

Yael Trusch: You're just making me want to be in Israel more, I mean, yeah, it's like part of your family life. A family outing. That is so awesome. I so love that and I think once my husband hears this, he's going to start pushing for all the Alyiah situation.

Miriam Ballin: Come on over! That would be awesome.

Yael Trusch: My favorite Mitzvah or one I feel most connected with is?

Miriam Ballin: My favorite Mitzvah? Tzadakah.

Yael Trusch: Hm.

Miriam Ballin: I feel like a very big drive to try to help people have what they need. I often find myself trying to help our medics out or other people in the area, in the neighborhood. We live in Rechavia which is a very affluent area considered in Jerusalem yet don't forget that there are people here that can't support to buy bread or milk and will often try to help people out and take a case upon myself and just like ask, all the people that are walking about enjoying their life whenever you thought about not being able to buy milk and bread, if they can help support those because it just breaks me so much to see people that don't have what they need.

Yael Trusch: Beautiful.

Miriam Ballin: And obviously to support important causes. There are so many important causes that people don't appreciate enough or you just don't know about them enough to appreciate and want to contribute. I recently finished a campaign here in our own neighborhood where I basically went from door to door trying to collect funds for our ambulance for our neighborhood.

Yael Trusch: Wow.

Miriam Ballin: And we manage in the end to come up with the \$180,000, so we now have an ambulance specifically here in our neighborhood. It even is able to be divided into a unique type of ambulance to treat people emotionally and divides them to clinics but it's really a nice feeling. The ambulance is actually yesterday escorting the Rav Shaiman at his *Ievaya* through the hundreds of thousands of people.

Yael Trusch: Wow.

Miriam Ballin: And it's just an amazing thing to know that you helped raised funds for something—it is annoying to raise funds, trust me. I hate asking for stuff and money.

But being able to get money, bring it to a good cause, see what comes to fruition is really a very, very fulfilling end result.

Yael Trusch: So beautiful! You know I forgot to tell you before, I recently had a guest on the show she also lives in Israel and when I asked her what she likes to give Tzedakah to, she said, Hatzalah, because she said these words! She said, I have tremendous *Hakaras HaTov* for Hatzalah and she had an incident where she took the wrong medication and she had an allergic reaction and it was not a good thing and not a fun thing and Hatzalah was there to save her.

Miriam Ballin: Oh, wow!

Yael Trusch: Yeah! My fondest, sweetest Jewish memory is?

Miriam Ballin: Wow...

Yael Trusch: So many.

Miriam Ballin: Hang on, I'm not supposed to think about it, I'm supposed to answer on the spot! I think I grew up in very small town Jewish community and this sounds really funny and dorky but one of the most significant things in my life as a Jew was coming to New York and I came to Monsey in New York for the very first time. I have never been out of town all that time and they took me to this grocery store where there are kosher.

Yael Trusch: Uh-huh!

Miriam Ballin: I'm like, I remember we walked in and they we're like, you know everything here is kosher. And I was like, what?

Yael Trusch: What?

Miriam Ballin: Everything? And to me that was like the most incredible, remarkable thing that you could have and now we have a bunch of them all over. We have Seven Mile in Baltimore, we have Pomegranate in New York, and we have huge grocery store that are entirely filled with kosher food all over. But at that time like I had just never been exposed to a grocery that is entirely kosher. We had to go to a local Safeway like choose between the products and mostly we're not kosher. It was really very amazing and it just leave me with this feeling that our people are growing and developing and building and look at what we've achieved. We have like grocery stores for the communities entirely filled with Kosher food that for me was like even as a small child, like really impacting.

Yael Trusch: What a beautiful answer. That's so awesome and it's so true. Even my kids. Listen, we live in Houston and it's not... when my kids go to New York, the few times that they've been there, it's like, what? They can't believe it! They're like kids in a candy store, everything is kosher.

Miriam Ballin: Totally.

Yael Trusch: Miriam, did you—

Miriam Ballin: Totally. I'm still like that.

Yael Trusch: I'm sure. Is your family still in the United States?

Miriam Ballin: My family actually just moved to Israel.

Yael Trusch: Oh, very nice! That's super cool!

Miriam Ballin: Yeah! We didn't even realize what it was like, like how hard it was not having any family here until all of a sudden we have family here. And it was like, all right, you can have parents so they can even help out or you can call them when like it's a normal hour for you and it's like a whole new world now.

Yael Trusch: That's so beautiful. That's so beautiful. Your husband's family still remains in Australia?

Miriam Ballin: Yeah. Yeah.

Yael Trusch: Okay. Something I wish I had learned about Judaism growing up is?

Miriam Ballin: I think that not everything is black and white. I think that you know they often present our Judaism to us with black and white. This is bad, this is good. This was wrong, this was right. And obviously there are some things that are always bad and there are some things that are always wrong but I think that the flexibility of understanding that different people come from different backgrounds and therefore we need to really appreciate the good that they have within them, and not judge and try to work with them and appreciate them or even different things that we do as Jews, something may be difficult for us but it's not either we do it or we don't do it. It's not all or nothing. I think like sometimes just looking at things with a bit of flexibility you have the chance to understand them, and once you understand them we can appreciate them and now we can do them, live, them and grow from them.

Yael Trusch: Yeah. You know I agree. I think we lived in a sea of gray. There's a lot of gray between the black and white and Judaism helps us navigate the gray. There's a lot of gray area.

MIRIAM BALLIN: Yes.

Yael Trusch: And finally...

MIRIAM BALLIN: We have to be aware of the gray area. If you are not aware of the gray area then you get locked in the gray area.

Yael Trusch: Yes.

MIRIAM BALLIN: And that's the change.

Yael Trusch: Yes. And that's where Judaism is a guiding light to make us aware and help us navigate that. Finally, I'm Miriam Ballin, and today I'm most grateful for?

MIRIAM BALLIN: My family.

Yael Trusch: Oh...

MIRIAM BALLIN: My family definitely. My husband specifically because I have the most unbelievable supportive husband who allows me to do all of what I do and when most husbands would say, you're not... or enough... or forget about it; and he says, go for it, that's how I got to Houston, that's how I got to here, that's how I was able to be paramedic in a language that I never spoke and the reason why I feel like we've succeeded and unit has succeeded it's mostly because of him.

Yael Trusch: So beautiful. And yes, I forgot to highlight that. That you did mentioned it briefly, but you were in Houston right after Harvey. How did that happen by the way? How did you get picked?

MIRIAM BALLIN: It was an amazing story. I am still on a high from it. It's already been three months ago.

Yael Trusch: Okay. Tell us?

MIRIAM BALLIN: Basically what happened was I was following the storm because I am from Houston and you know I wanted to know what was going on, what was being damaged, what like what is happening and I was following it on line and my husband was looking at me following it on line and then he said, you know, you really need to be there. And I said, I need to be there? I need to be here, I've got five kids, remember? Hello! And he was like, no, you and your people should be there. You have an amazing thing that you can contribute there and he was referring to the Psychotrauma work, of having all these people devastated who have lost their homes and even family members and he said, you should go. And that literally, a moment later, I got a phone call from an organization saying prepare a team, you're going out to Houston. You'll be

providing Psychotrauma work there. And I got a team together and went out there literally the next day and we arrived in Houston. Actually we thought we were going to be helping the Jewish community. We were prepared to come and help the Jewish community and what we found was very amazing. That the Jewish community actually had so much support that there was not a need for us and we got a phone call from the Mayor of Houston, and he said, no, no. What we need right now from you is for you to go out to Beaumont those areas are still like in the worst of the worst and they're still trying to save people off from their rooftops and air mattresses and all those horror stories that you're watching on the computer, on TV... those are all taking place and we need to go over there. And then we went there and it was really a journey. Just getting there physically, we drove through like four feet of water and we were told we can't get through and that we won't be allowed through and we used a lot of chutzpah to make sure we got through and at the end of that day. And when we arrived the American Red Cross really incorporated us right into their fully integrated part of the Triage process and we were able to really help thousands of people that were coming off from buses who are displaced from all over and worked with them, do emotional and psychological counseling with them, get them off to the next safe place that was Dallas Convention Center and I really came to give and I think I got so much more than what I gave.

Yael Trusch: That is amazing! Isn't that so true? When we give, we gain so much more than we think, right?

Miriam Ballin: So much. And these people were able to smile and be happy and give hope to each other and love each other when they had just literally lost everything.

Yael Trusch: It's amazing. Did they realize—

Miriam Ballin: It was really moving.

Yael Trusch: Did they realize you and your team came from Israel? Not that it's important but I'm just curious.

Miriam Ballin: They realized. I made sure to tell them. Everyone that we met we made sure to tell them. Jews, they didn't necessarily know what a Jew was or wasn't, but Israel and the people of Israel was very significant for them, especially being the the it's the Bible Belt.

Yael Trusch: Good!

Miriam Ballin: Very religious, I mean, we were really relying on their faith a lot to be able to get out of this and to know that people of Israel had actually come to be with them that was like in and out of itself something that meant so much to them. You could see on their face.

Yael Trusch: Wow! Good. Amazing! That's beautiful. Miriam, thank you so much. Thank you for taking the time to do this. It's Chanukah. I'm sure everybody's waiting for you upstairs at home, back at home. I so appreciate it. You make me so proud. You make all of us so proud! And I encourage everybody to, I guess, well you know, watch they should follow you, they should see, they should get involved in their local Hatzalah, they should donate to United Hatzalah. Hatzalah, it's so important.

Miriam Ballin: It's so important and ladies out there, follow your dreams. You can achieve so much. It's the holiday of miracles, anything can happen if you believe in it you can make it happen. Good luck! I'm going to eat a donut!

Yael Trusch: Beautiful. Thank you so much, Miriam.

Miriam Ballin: Take care.

[Theme Music]

Yael Trusch: Thanks to Miriam Ballin for stopping by. Miriam almost took me on an adventure or at least I felt like that it could happen in a minute. We recorded on Chanukah while Miriam was sitting in her car with her radio and her phone plugged as of course she could be called anytime. So you can imagine how much I appreciated her being here with us today. To find out more about United Hatzalah and to donate to this worthy organization, go to www.israelrescue.org, and of course, make sure you're supporting your local Hatzalah unit and if you don't have one yet, perhaps you found inspiration in Miriam's words and help get one started in your hometown. Maybe that should be one of our goals in 2018. What can we be doing, practically speaking to help save a life? Wow, seems daunting but I guess it really need not be. There's a lot that we could be doing. United Hatzalah is on Facebook at [united.hatzalah.jerusalem](https://www.facebook.com/united.hatzalah.jerusalem). All of these and more back at www.jewishlatinprincess.com. Have a great week.

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