

DOES GOD FAVOR GATORS?

I have been moved by reading people's stories of our dear colleague, Harold Kushner z'l. I love a story he told at the RA Convention about 15 years ago. I have used this story several times to open a sermon.

In 2006, Rabbi Kushner was invited to speak at the Hillel at the University of Florida. The talk was going to be in the evening, so when he arrived on campus early, he was notified that the men's basketball coach, Billy Donovan, wanted to meet with him. Donovan and his wife had lost a child, and they had gotten great comfort from reading *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

Rabbi Kushner went over to the sports complex, and met with Coach Donovan and his wife in the coach's office. Following Rabbi Kushner's visit with Donovan and his wife, Donovan invited the other coaches into the office and he said, "Rabbi Kushner, we are about to start the NCAA Basketball Tournament and the other coaches and I wanted to know if you would bless our team."

In recounting the story, Rabbi Kushner said he was surprised by the request. He was thinking, "I've never been asked to bless a sports team before. I didn't know what to say and then all of sudden I started saying a Mi Shebeyrach -- at the appropriate time I said, 'The University of Florida Men's Basketball team.'" Well, that team went on to win the NCAA Tournament.

Rabbi Kushner continued, "One year later, I'm sitting in my office in Natick and I get a call from Coach Donovan. I said, 'Hello, to what do I owe this honor' and Coach Donovan said, "Rabbi, you blessed our team last year and we won the tournament, do you think you could bless us again?" So Rabbi Kushner offered them the same Mi Shebeyrach prayer that he had said the year before. And wouldn't you know it -- The University of Florida Gators Men's Basketball Team won the NCAA Tournament again.