

BH. Sermon Day 1 Rosh Hashanah 5780

Delivered at Chabad of Port Washington

Rabbi Shalom M. Paltiel

### **After Pittsburgh & Poway: JEWISH LIFE WILL NEVER BE THE SAME**

*So these two businessmen, who happened to be anti-Semites, were standing around in their soon-to-be opened store on the east side of Manhattan... The store wasn't ready yet, so there was no merchandise on display... One guy says to the other, "Watch – any minute now, some Jew is going to stick his head in and ask us what we're selling."*

*No sooner did he finish saying this when in walks a "yiddle"... you know what a yiddle is? A little old European Jew... like a Jewish version of Colombo... someone who is much smarter than he appears... a curious old yid walked to the window, took a peek, and stepped inside... "So, vat ya sellin' here?" he asked...*

*Elbowing his buddy (as if to say, "what did I tell you?"), the first guy replied to the old man sarcastically, "We're selling idiots."*

*Not missing a beat, the old Jew says, "Must be doing very vell — only two left!"*

**It's no secret that anti-Semitism has been on the rise lately**

**This year we witnessed the worst anti-Semitic attacks in US history**

Pittsburgh... 11 Jews gunned down during prayer

And then Poway, at the closing of Passover, at Chabad

We witnessed blatant violent anti-Semitism right here at home. It's happened twice now... in our houses of worship...

I think when we looked at each other, the day after these horrific tragedies, what we were saying without so many words is:

**It's a new day...**

**Jewish life will never be the same.**

**In Pittsburgh Jews gathered for prayer on a Shabbat morning, and to celebrate a Bris,**

**A Jewish child entering into the Covenant – the eternal bond – which G-d made with our founding father Abraham**

**Just days before 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristallnacht, the gunman walked in shouting:**

**“All Jews must die”**

**He didn't say all Conservative Jews must die**

**All Reform Jews must die**

**All Orthodox... Chabad... Sefardik... Aashkenazic... Zionist... anti-Zionist... Religious... Secular...**

He said none of that. He simply said: ALL JEWS!

We're a people of many opinions, which is fine, unity doesn't mean uniformity... but at times it splinters us and divides us

The enemy at times reminds us of the truth: we're one people

**Pittsburgh has been called the city of bridges... there are more bridges there than in any city or region in the world**

Pittsburgh is indeed building bridges between us

When we think of the other Jew who looks, dresses or practices differently as not my type... our enemies remind us

**He says all Jews must die**

**We say all Jews must live!**

**All Jews must unite!**

**We are AM YISRAEL - AM ECHAD!**

**We need to remember to look at each other as one people... under G-d... indivisible... with love and genuine respect for all!**

**And then there was the attack on the Chabad of Poway**

**That hit close to home as you can imagine... as a Chabad rabbi...**

**I also have a personal connection to Chabad of Poway because back in 1991,** before the Rebbe sent me to Port Washington, I had seriously considered taking up the post as assistant rabbi to Rabbi Goldstein of Poway. Sara and I spent a week there, got to know the community,

I spent a Shabbat leading the service, delivering my first sermon...

**I must tell you, the weather wasn't that difficult to get used to...** he was smart Goldstein – he flew us out in the dead of Winter, from Brooklyn to Southern California, for a week...

(It wasn't meant to be, the Rebbe discouraged it and very much encouraged us coming here, to this amazing town, but that's a story for another day...)

But Goldstein and I have stayed in touch, and have remained friends.

And what a tremendous guy he is!

I mean, immediately after the shooting, he stands up with his fingers dangling, dripping in blood, gets up on a chair in the shul's parking lot and delivers a pep talk to his congregation that AM YISRAEL CHAI, and Jews don't back down, and we shall overcome! WOW!!!

Another example of how special a man he is:

***A local pastor in Poway spoke the next day after the shooting at his service, saying he was friends with Rabbi Goldstein, and they had texted each other etc. and that Goldstein had thanked him for the prayers etc.***

(click here for the video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ5LtgS\\_1XI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ5LtgS_1XI))

Then he told the following story:

*Back in the 90's when he just arrived he had travelled to Israel and in souvenir shop he bought a bumper sticker:*

***Moshiach is coming soon (all in Hebrew).***

*Which was actually produced by Chabad in Israel...*

*He came home and put it on his car... Moshiach is coming soon...*

*Driving around town, car behind him, changing lanes with him, turned, he turned, until he turned into the parking lot of the church... Goldstein gets out...*

*“Why do you have this bumper sticker that the messiah is coming soon...”*

*Because that's what I believe... in fact I'm the new pastor here.*

*Goldstein smiled and said:*

***“Give me a big hug... we must be friends, anyone who believes Messiah is coming soon must be friends, because that's what we believe...”***

*I told him but we believe he's coming back...*

*Goldstein: Well we believe the Messiah is coming, yeah we don't believe he's coming back...*

*But don't worry about it... let's work hard to do good things for the Messiah to come,*

***When he gets here we'll ask him if he's been here before...***

**Goldstein's message was Am Yisroel Chai!**

**Being the last day of Passover, he quoted the Hagaddah - vehi sehomdo...** in every generation there will be some who rise up against us to destroy us, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, always saves us from their hands...

**I'm holding in my hand my speech delivered there Shabbos Parshat Yitro, January, 1991** on the subject of – “hasneh einenu ukol” - “The bush is aflame but it does not become consumed”.

G-d is telling Moses, over the millennia the fires of hate will attempt to burn your people, to destroy your people, those who hate G-d and goodness will also hate the Jew the carrier of that message, the carriers of the torch, G-d's witnesses to the world. G-d told Moses at the outset – don't expect it to be easy street, being G-d's chosen people...

**The bush might burn... time and again... but it will NEVER be consumed!  
It's my eternal covenant and promise with my eternal people!**

**Reb Chanina ben Tradyon**, one of the greatest sages of the Talmud, was burned by the Romans for being a Jewish sage. While the Romans set on fire a Torah scroll wrapped around his body, his students asked: What do you see, Rebbe? “I see parchment burning but the letters flying heavenward”

What is the meaning of this strange exchange between teacher and students?

The students are asking their Rebbe – what do you see in terms of a Jewish future? If the great Torah scholars are being burned while wrapped in a Torah scroll, and there's so much destruction and bloodshed, is there a Jewish future to speak of, to envision? What do you see ahead?!

Answered their Rebbe: Yes, at times there may be physical persecution, even death... that will take place until Moshiach comes... but the souls fly heavenward. They might destroy our bodies but the Jewish people & their message remain forever...

**We lost Lori Kaye a'h in Poway, the amazing, holy woman, who arguably gave her life to save her rabbi...**

**Her kindness,**

leaving challahs on cars for everyone

giving blank checks for tzedakah to friends going on vacation

to far away lands, with instructions to find a needy person or cause to help... her best friend who spoke at her funeral said, she would go on exotic vacations to Africa, South America, but she couldn't just relax and enjoy the vacations... she was busy half the time researching local charities to whom to dispense Lori's checks...

**Let me share something which is unbelievable: I hold in my hand the copy of a check from Lori Gilbert-Kaye** which she sent to Chabad of Thailand. We are their US office for donations sent in the US, being Sara's sister and BIL are the Chabad emissaries to Thailand. This check arrived here to this office that Saturday, the day of the murder! ...

It jolted me... and reminded me that her neshama – soul - is alive and well and continues to have impact!

**The Talmud relates a story of one of the great sages, Reb Yosi,** a student of the famous Rabbi Akiva, who lived in the first century, just after the Temple's destruction. The Jewish people were devastated, blood was flowing like rivers, historians estimate a million Jewish deaths in that period...

R' Yosi witnessed the death of so many, including his great teacher Rabbi Akiva... He's shattered...

Says the Talmud, one day he's traveling on the road, and he walks into a ruin to pray... While he's there trying to concentrate on his prayers he hears a sound, he realizes he's not alone in the ruin. He looks around and sees... the Prophet Elijah, Eliyahu Hanavi, has come from the other world... He says to the rabbi: Why did you come in to the ruin? "To pray. I came in here to pray". Says the prophet: Get back on the road... "But I'm afraid I'll be interrupted..." No, says Elijah. Get back on the road and pray...

What is the meaning of this strange conversation? Why does the prophet have to come from the other world to instruct the rabbi on the location of his prayer, whether in the ruin or on the road?

There is depth to this exchange that is relevant and empowering to us, here and now. The Rabbi feels he can't continue "on the road..." He's seen too much devastation... and pain... He can't move on. He's been defined by the ruins. Yes, he has still maintained his faith, he's praying... but he's praying in the shadows of the ruin... Says Elijah – "Don't define yourself by the ruin, by victimization, by devastation, by anti-Semitism... get back on the road... continue looking ahead to the future."

Friends, yes, we've witnessed devastation. 12 holy Jews were gunned down this year in synagogues right here in the US. And yes, we're all shaken up

And yes we must respond to the ruins, we must do whatever is possible to fight anti-Semitism, as is done by so many of our amazing Jewish organizations... And yes, we must beef up security at every Jewish center and synagogues...

**But that's not what defines us.**

**What does define us?!**

**As Rabbi Goldstein said: Am Yisroel Chai. Light onto the nations, onto the world**

**It's so important we don't define our Judaism by anti-Semitism or survival**

**If our kids have no idea what a Jew means, except that everyone hates us and we gotta fight to survive – why are we surprised they want no part of it...**

**If all our kids know about being Jewish is that the entire world is against us, where does that leave them? Then there must be something wrong with us...**

**Let's define ourselves our G-d's chosen people – am Yisrael chai – to be a light unto the nations**

**They'll understand who we are, our peoplehood, our mission**

**They'll stand up tall and proud!**

**And not to be embarrassed with their Jewishness...**

**They'll continue to walk on the road, on the path of our people, of our history, of our destiny...**

*There's an old joke about an army captain trying to determine the religion of his men for their dog tags. He calls each one's name and each steps up and answers affirmatively: "Jones, Catholic, sir... O'Donnell, Protestant, sir... Smith, Unitarian, sir... Then Davidson is called. Davidson! The private gets up and stammers, "Well, sir, you see, my family wasn't really religious, we did some of our traditions, but mostly we... and the captain interrupts and says: "Jewish!"*

*Jews sometimes need a lesson in standing up tall*

*Why should I be proud of a people whose sole mission is survival...*

**Why did Israel institute Jewish knowledge course:**

The Minister of education and culture in the 50s, a man named, Zalman Aran, a non-believer, is the one who established it nationwide, in every state school. Why?

It was the **1956 Olympics in Melbourne, a soccer matchup between Israel & Russia**, a big game in Moscow and one in Ramat Gan. Wow, it's just 3 years after Stalin's death, 40,000 Russian Jews gathered (legally) to watch, Israeli athletes

with Israel's menorah on their chest, the Russian band plays the Israeli anthem and the Russian anthem... wow the pride these Jews felt... Israel wins the game... such pride... That Shabbat, the central synagogue in Moscow is packed... out the door onto the street. The team is there as well sitting prominently up front. They then call up one of the top players for an Aliya... He steps up to the bimah... the whole shul is watching, what a moment...

**And... he can't make the bracha... he doesn't know the blessing...**

At that moment, the secular Zalman Aran said – NO! This can't be! He went home to Israel and established an across the board course in every school, a Jewish knowledge course!

**Let's not define Judaism by survival, by anti-Semitism, and then wonder why our children aren't interested**

**Who wants to be a victim, trying to survive**

**We're a light unto the nations, with a rich, timeless heritage,**

**We're G-d's witnesses to the world**

**The carriers of his Torah, His eternal message to humanity**

**Who taught the world monotheism, hospitality, charity, and the dignity and intrinsic value of human life**

**Let's teach our children how to make the proverbial blessing on the Torah... let's teach them how to celebrate its message in daily life**

**Besides, that all the news is bad... A recent Pew survey shows most non-Jewish Americans have positive feelings towards Jews.**

**The poll actually says, Jews are more highly regarded than any religious group in the country. Most people in this country don't like anti-Semites and they support Israel.**

**But let's not define ourselves with survival, with anti-semitism, with victimhood...**

**We don't survive, we thrive**

**Anti-Semitism has experienced an uptick.**

**But so has Jewish practice experienced an uptick!**

**Jewish practice is alive and well**

**And has experienced a huge uptick, it's booming, it's back in!**

**Dear friends, after Pittsburgh and Poway...**

**When we say: Jewish life will never be the same... it sure won't**

In the sense of security at Shuls, including ours

**But Jewish life will never be the same because this was a wake up call...**

**And... when they're shooting at us in our synagogues, shouting All Jews must die**

**The Jewish response has been: All Jews must come to shul!**

**A Chabad rabbi in a suburb of Atlanta** walks into Shul on the Saturday morning of Pittsburgh to get ready for the service. Of course he had no idea what just took place... His smartphone was on Shabbos mode... As he's sitting there alone in his Chabad House, picture this friends... there's no one else in the building... he's cleaning up the prayer-books and setting up the coffee cups... when suddenly the door opens and in walk a group of 10 bikers... With full leather gear... The rabbi not sure if he should laugh, cry, run or hide... "Howdy..." "Uh huh"...

Wait, it gets better... One of them walks over the rabbi, moves his leather vest a little bit out of the way, revealing a fire arm... "Rabbi, we're here to protect you..."

Remember now, the good rabbi has absolutely no idea what just happened at a synagogue 700 miles away... He swallows deep... “you’re... here... to... protect... me...” Plus, he’s from New York... and he knows its not good news when people walk in off the street offering protection...

He does notice a couple Star of David necklaces dangling from their necks... but he still isn’t sure what’s going on... until they realize he’s clueless and tell him what happened...

He welcomes them, and thanks them... I mean full leather gear and all...

(if it was a weekday they’d feel right at home with the tefillin with all the leather all over the place...)

PS they stayed on for the entire service... guys who haven’t been to a shul even on Yom Kippur for decades...

Some of them haven’t stopped coming... they’re there every Shabbat!

**Friends, its true - Jewish life will never be the same! We’ve got the bikers coming to shul... We’ve got the “Hillel’s angels” comin’ over for some gefilte fish...**

**I’ve seen it here in our community:**

**A woman here wrote on the Mitzvah card after Pittsburgh she’s lighting candles 11 times for Pittsburgh... after Poway she said I’m just gonna light ‘em!**

***“I’m gonna keep Lori’s Shabbat candle burning”***

**Another Woman committed to 11 Shabbats at shul... after Poway she said “whose counting – you’ll see me here whenever I can make it”**

**Our Shabbat and daily minyans have grown, our Torah classes are growing, more mezuzhas, more phone calls for me to call in the “treif busters” to kosherize their kitchens, more people walking the streets of Port Washington with their Kippahs proudly displayed on their heads, more people observing Shabbat, getting together for Shabbat dinner to celebrate Jewishness...**

**AJC encouraged everyone to “show up for shabbat”** the Shabbos after Pittsburgh – it was the greatest Jewish social media event ever!

You’d think who would show up at shul if they’re shooting us... but no, they came en masse!

**and it’s happening again this year on the anniversary of that painful day,** the last Shabbat in October, and we’re joining this campaign, details are on your seats

**Pittsburgh is known as the Steel City** – it was once the largest producer of steel in the world

**The steel city – brought home the message - we are unbreakable**

**They woke up a sleeping lion...**

More yiden at shuls, more tefilin, more shabbat candles,

**Chabad did a mezuzah campaign** here on Long Island - 11,000 mezuzahs installed in first thirty days after Pittsburgh

**Indeed, Jewish life will never be the same! We’ve been woken up from complacency.**

**We’re all called up for active duty, like reservists at war time**

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**The Rebbe had a special relationship with Arik Sharon,** famous Israeli general

and then PM. This secular tough general loved the Rebbe, he understood how deeply he cared for each of his brethren, he often consulted with the Rebbe on specific strategic details involving Israeli military and security decisions, and was always amazed at the Rebbe's profound grasp of these subjects, akin to a seasoned general...

Once, while he was with the Rebbe, the Rebbe said to him:

The Jewish people must be mobilized – using the military term.

Sharon thought he heard: Organized. Yes, he said. The Jewish people must organize.

No, the Rebbe corrected him. Organized is nice... but that could mean a few Jewish leaders get together for dinner, they talk, and then the resolution is... to call another meeting... they're organized... but nothing happened.

We need to mobilize, we need to have a clear plan of action...

Sharon told the Rebbe that wherever he goes he speaks to university students and encourages them to take pride in being part of the greatest nation on earth... The Rebbe said to him: That's good, but what did you tell them to do!?

It's not enough to have them identify as Jews... We need to give them a call for action. Shabbat, mitzvahs, building the land, study of our Torah... An action plan!

**Let's resolve today, as we begin this New Year – a new Mitzvah resolution**

**For each of us, in our own lives and in our own homes:**

**Jewish life will never be the same!**

**Dear friends, let's each walk out today with an action plan. Something each of us will do moving forward, so that Jewish life for us will never be the same!**

**And I close with this story:**

**Some centuries ago in Poland, an anti-Semitic governor arises with an evil decree against the Jews in his province.** He gathers all the Jews to town's square telling them his new decree, of expulsion, taxation etc. The Jews are crying... hugging each other...

One old yiddel at the back of the crowd is laughing... The anti Semite can't handle it: What's so funny, he barks!? And he continues his hateful rant... But the yidel can't stop laughing, by now he's laughing out loud.... "What's so funny Jew?!"

I'll tell you. You're not the first evil man to rise up against us... The once was a man named Pharaoh who enslaved us and tried to destroy us. Well, he's gone, we're here, and in his memory we have a holiday called Passover when we eat Matzah. Another man named Haman, tried to implement the final solution, he's gone, we're here, and in his memory we have a holiday called Purim when we eat Hamantaschen. Another tyrant Antiochus, he's gone, we're here, in his memory we have a holiday called Chanukah when we eat latkes and donuts...

**I'm standing here thinking: What foods will we eat in honor of YOUR DEFEAT!?!?**

**Every 100 years another chochom things he's come up with the final solution... but it doesn't work, it'll never work... we're only becoming stronger...**

**The shoes from Auschwitz have been replaced with BOOTS FROM THE IDF!**

**G-d made a bris with us, an eternal covenant...**

**That we're an eternal people, a people with an unbreakable faith**

**A gentle people... but with a faith of steel**

**A diverse people... yet bridged together with the strongest steel cables of love for one another**

**A united people, one nation, under one G-d**

**A people that no fires can consume...**

**And today, a people mobilized perhaps more than ever**

**A people who will never be the same!**

**Am Yisrael CHAI!**

**Shana Tova!**