

Delivered by **Rabbi Shalom M. Paltiel**  
At Chabad of Port Washington

### Coping with Fear and Uncertainty

*So these four Jewish retirees are sitting on a bench in Miami Beach for their weekly get-together.... After a long period of silence, one of them finally lets out a great big sigh: “Oy yoy yoy” he says... A few moments later, the second guy shakes his head and says: “Oy vey!... Vus vet zain – what’s going to be?”... Shortly after that, the third one says “Vey iz mir!”... At which point, the fourth one jumps up and exclaims: “If you three don’t stop talking politics, I’m leaving!”*

There’s no doubt about it: Politics – “election fever” – is in the air... As a matter of fact, in a sense, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is also “Election Day”; when we “elect” G-d as our King - so to speak... Today G-d asks each of us for our vote. He wants our vote... Believe it or not - He needs our vote... just like parents need their children to be good.

So the question we have to ask ourselves today is - does He have it?... Does G-d have my vote? Will I do my best to follow support His platform and His vision for the coming year?

By the way, judging by the voter turnout in this room, I think G-d’s in good shape to have a good day at the polls...

As for McCain vs. Obama, I don’t know... I can just hear the voices - “*If you start talking politics, I’m leaving!*”.... So I won’t get into the actual politics, but with all of the maneuvering and posturing – moves and countermoves on both sides – I don’t think we’ve ever seen an election like this before, have we?... Beyond all of this fascination with the political theater, there is real concern out there as to what’s going to be – no matter who ends up being president... People are afraid...

The world has become an increasingly dangerous place... Iraq, Iran, Gaza, Pakistan, Afghanistan, North Korea, Venezuela – trouble spots all over the place... Mad tyrants and dictators – with access to vast treasure and ominous weaponry – in positions of power ... Hundreds of thousands of terrorists with evil designs against Israel and America... China is flexing its economic muscle... Russia is flexing its military muscle – bringing back some old nightmares... The floundering American economy – from the housing crisis to the energy shortage; the total meltdown of the financial institutions to the plummeting of the stock market; rising inflation to falling employment... Government bailouts to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars... Is this a recession or a depression?... There’s some real turmoil going on out there... There is fear, there is anxiety... There is uncertainty and there is confusion...

*On top of this there are the environmental issues that worry many people... we at Chabad have decided to help out... Chabad is going green: We now accept cash. I'm doing my part to help the situation. I will be recycling my jokes from last year...*

But seriously now... people are worried, people are scared. *Mah yihyeh?... Vos vet zain?...* What's going to be? --- are the questions very much on people's minds... Will this economy bury me?... Will I still have a job?... Will I be able to support my family?... What's gonna be?...

Allow me to give you the Torah's simple yet profound perspective on how to deal with stress and difficult times... So everybody, sit back and relax... Take a deep breath...

(Pause)

You might be familiar with the story of the Amalekites, who were the first to wage war against our people upon leaving Egypt. The Jewish People are fresh out of Egypt... They're traveling in the desert and the Amalekites come out to attack... A brutal and ferocious war breaks out... Moses goes up to the top of a hill with his brother, Aaron, and nephew, Chur, at his sides... Says the Talmud: When Moses would raise his hands toward the heavens, Israel would gain the upper hand in the battle... But when his hands were lowered, Amalek would gain the upper hand... Eventually, Aaron and Chur supported Moses' hands so that they'd stay up the entire time - until total victory was achieved....

So the Talmud asks: "What's going on here?... Do the hands of Moses somehow wage war – cause victory or defeat?"... His hands are up, they win; they come down, they lose!?... Is this some sort of video game?... Push the joystick this way, you beat the bad guys; push it the other way; the bad guys beat you?... (Or these days, they have these "Wii" games... the latest time waster that was just invented)... But this was a real war they were fighting against Amalek!... How is it that Moses' hands being up or down were somehow the keys to victory?...

The Talmud goes on to explain what was really going on: When the Jewish People would look upward and direct their hearts toward their father in heaven, *hoyu misgabrim* – they would be victorious... "*V'im lav* - but if not; *hoyu noflin* - they would fall... In other words, upon seeing the hands of Moses raised high, the people were inspired!... It aroused their faith in G-d... They knew that the same G-d who had performed miracles for them in the recent past was with them once again in battle... And as long as this faith and confidence was so aroused, Amalek didn't stand a chance....

So the hands of Moses were not just "hands"... They were symbols of something deeper.... They served as signposts to remind the Israel of G-d's presence – enabling them to overcome their fears; to fight like they needed to fight and allow G-d's blessings and miracles to shine through.....

Every story in the Torah has deeper spiritual and psychological meaning as well. Amalek, considered to be the arch enemy of our people, is not just a certain nation that existed 3000 years ago. Amalek exists spiritually and psychologically within every one of us. Just when we're about to break free from bondage and the slavery of negativity, Amalek shows up to get in the way. "Amalek" represents uncertainty... Indeed, the word Amalek has the "gematria" – the same numerical value – as the word "safek" (240) which means doubt... In our own lives, we're constantly battling our own "Amaleks" – those doubts and uncertainties lurking in the shadows – terrorizing us and preventing us from functioning... Like our ancestors looking at the hands of Moses, we must be able to see beyond the external to the Divine Providence in our world and our lives... That takes vision... We need to keep our eye on the "hands of Moses" – on Heaven... That takes a view of the bigger picture – beyond what we see in the here and now...

(Pause)

When we keep our eyes Heavenward, when our faith is intact, we don't worry as much... some people think it's a Jewish custom to worry. That's what Jews do... Jewish mother sends a telegram: Start worrying, details to follow. Or the Jewish answering machine: You've reached the Goldsteins. At the tone leave your bad news.

IN truth, it's not Jewish to worry. It's Jewish to have faith and trust in G-d, to be positive and optimistic. That's Jewish.

The Rebbe, Rabbi Schneerson of blessed memory, taught us the importance of optimism. In 1978 the Rebbe suffered a massive heart attack on Simchas Torah in the shul. Later that night the doctor told him how severe the situation was. "Do you realize, rabbi, there is a 20 percent chance you won't live through the night". To which the Rebbe responded: "That means I have an 80 percent chance that I will". With that attitude of optimism, which is really synonymous with faith, he continued to live another 16 years during which he created a literal renaissance in the Jewish world, establishing Chabad centers in more than 1000 communities around the globe.

*There is a legend told that King Solomon once wanted to humble his most trusted minister, Benaiah ben Yehoyada... He said to him: "Benaiah, there is a certain ring that I want you to bring to me... This ring has magic powers in that if a happy person looks at it, he becomes sad, and if a sad person looks at it, he becomes happy... I'd like to have this ring in my possession by the holiday of Succos, which gives you six months to find it..."*

*Benaiah said: "Your majesty, if such a ring exists anywhere on earth, believe me, I will find it and bring it to you..."*

*The story goes that, for months, Benaiah searched high and low but could not find any such ring... On the day before Succos, he went for a walk in one of the poorest sections of Jerusalem... He passed by a merchant who was setting out his wares on a shabby carpet...*

*Benaiah said to this simple merchant: “Have you ever heard of a magic ring that makes the happy wearer forget his joy and the broken-hearted wearer forget his sorrows?”*

*The man took a plain gold ring from his carpet, engraved something on it and handed it back to Benaiah... The minister read the words on the ring, smiled, paid for the ring and headed back to the palace...*

*That night, at the grand Succos festival, King Solomon turned to Benaiah and said: “Well, have you found what I asked for?” ... Everyone was amused, waiting for Benaiah to fall in disgrace... But sure enough, Benaiah produced a small gold ring and presented it to the king... King Solomon read the inscription... The jeweler had inscribed three Hebrew words on the gold band: **“Gam zeh yaavor – this too shall pass”**...*

*Shlomo Hamelech nodded in approval... He put this ring on his finger and wore it every day thereafter... Gam zeh yaavor – This too shall pass...*

*In 1859, President Abraham Lincoln gave an important speech to the Wisconsin Agricultural Society... The people were in a very bad way – hurting financially... The President got up and told this story of King Solomon and Benaiah... It’s true that we cannot know what the future holds in store for us... Though in difficult times, we can be comforted by the wisdom of these words: ‘This too shall pass’...*

There is a classic Jewish saying: “Life is like a *galgal hachozzer* – a turning wheel... When you’re on top, you have to remember it doesn’t mean you’ll always stay there... And when you’re on bottom, you have to remember that it doesn’t mean you’ll always stay there either...

The key is to know how to act and react in every given situation – up or down; negative or positive...

Life, by definition, is about constant changes – nothing stays the same... Look at a cardiogram... What does a healthy heart look like?... It’s up and down... (Sort of looks like the stock market, doesn’t it?)... A flat-line is never a good sign... Flat lines may be very peaceful, but they are not signs of life... You want peace and calm – where nothing ever changes?... It’s a nice illusion, but it’s not reality... What we should strive for is the ability to ride through the cycles – the ups and downs of life...

How do we do that?... Here’s the Torah’s formula:

What is the Jewish view about our destiny? There are 2 approaches to life: Responsibility or Surrender. There is the secular view and the religious view. Secular – it’s all up to you, G-d has nothing to do with what happens to you, it’s all up to you. “Responsibility”. Is that the Torah’s view? I don’t think so...

The religious view is “Surrender” – let go, it has nothing to do with you. “G-d is my pilot”. He’s driving, I’m just sitting comfortably in the back seat. Just sit back and do nothing because it won’t matter anyway. Is this Torah’s view? No...

Torah: Combination of both. We have to know how to let go of those things over which we have no control... And at the same time, to take responsibility for those things over which we do have control... G-d wants us to do whatever we can. Then we should trust in Him to do the rest. It’s like any smart, loving parent would do. I’m not going to give everything to my child on a silver platter because I want to give them a sense of self, and a sense of accomplishment, where they can take pride in their work. At the same time, the parent will never let the child fall; they will always be there to make sure in the end it all works out for the child’s best interest.

So it’s a combination of responsibility and letting go. A good swimmer knows when to swim and when to lay back and not fight the current... There’s a time to swim, but then when you hit choppy waters, instead of trying to fight the waves, you just ride them and let them carry you... The same is true in how we swim the waters of life... You have to know how to ride through a storm... This country – this world – is going through some stormy weather right now... **So Lesson Number One: Have the wisdom and the strength not to struggle with issues that you cannot control...** These are His department...

As it says in Psalms: “Cast your burdens upon G-d and He will sustain you”... In plain English, this means we have to do our job and let G-d do His... We have to learn that that we are not in control of everything... Ironically, it’s those people who think that they are in total control who are most vulnerable and, in fact, have the least control over their lives and their circumstances...

*Somebody told me that he recently went up to a lake resort where his kids convinced him to go on one of those parasailing rides.... You know where you get straddled into these straps attached to a parachute that’s attached by a rope to a speedboat... As the boat picks up speed, you’re lifted about 100 feet in the air – or as high as the rope will allow...*

*So this guy gets strapped into this thing – and his eight year old son is strapped in underneath him... As the seat starts lifting up high above the lake, the man is terrified!.. His eyes are shut tight in fear and terror and he’s hanging on for dear life to these cables that are on either side of him... He’s gripping those cables so tightly that his knuckles are turning white... In the meantime, his kid is having a blast – taking in the magnificent panoramic view of the beautiful lake.... He looks up at his dad and screams with delight: “Hey Ta, isn’t this fun!?”*

*With eyes still tightly shut, the man yells back: “Yossi, don’t let go!... I don’t know how much longer I can hold on here, but whatever you do, hold on to those ropes!...”*

*The kid replies: “Hold on to the ropes?... I let go of those ropes a long time ago!”.. The father opens his eyes, looks around and says: “Oh... I see...”*

Sometimes we think that the reason we're flying high is because we're doing all of this work... We're hanging on tightly to those ropes – gripping with all our might – when in reality, what's keeping us afloat is the parachute above... Ultimately, it's G-d's blessings that we depend upon... So open your eyes, relax, look at the scenery of life and enjoy the ride – no matter where it takes you...

(Pause)

In psychological terms, there is healthy stress and there is unhealthy stress... For example, if a person didn't feel pressure to make a living, he might just lie in bed and do nothing but watch TV and eat sunflower seeds all day... Healthy stress is one that motivates and leads to action... Unhealthy stress is when we're consumed with negativity and worry about situations we can do nothing about... We create all these doomsday scenarios thinking: "What will happen if this..." "What will happen if that"... Healthy stress gets us to get up and do something... Unhealthy stress just paralyzes us...

Look, if it hasn't happened yet, don't worry about it now!... Because things change!... Things have a way of changing in ways we cannot begin to foresee at this moment... In ways George Bush cannot foresee... In ways Vladimir Putin and Mamoud Ahmadinejad, *yemach shemo*, cannot foresee... In ways even Barak Obama and John McCain cannot foresee!...

And what if?... What if what you're worried about does indeed end up happening, G-d forbid? What good will you're worrying do?... As one writer put it: "Worry is interest we pay on our troubles before it comes due"... Why pay up front?

*You know the story... There was once a Baron – one of those powerful land barons back in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe – who had the power of life and death over those living in their townships... Most of them were notorious anti-Semites, but this particular Baron happened to have been pretty decent toward the Jews in his region... They were good for business, and he didn't abuse or persecute them...*

*Of all the prized possessions owned by this Baron, the one he favored most was his pet dog... How he loved that dog!... Talk about man's best friend – that mutt was the apple of his eye; the center of his universe...*

*One day, some of the anti-Semitic locals decided to stir up trouble for the Jews of the city... They approached the Baron – who was a pretty gullible guy – and said: "You think those Jews are loyal to you?... They're no such thing!... Did you know that Jews have the power to teach dogs to speak the language of man?... That's right – if they really wanted to do, they could teach your beloved Fido to talk! You'd be able to have conversation with him every day!... But they won't do it for you... They keep this talent to themselves and refuse to share it with the gentiles for whom they have total disdain... You watch!... Try asking them to train your dog to talk and they will refuse you" ...*

*This indeed angered the Baron... The Jews could teach his best friend to talk and they would dare refuse him – after he'd been so good to them all these years!?... He summoned the Jewish leaders of the city and demanded that they teach Fido to speak... The more these leaders insisted that they had no such powers, the angrier the Baron became... Finally, he laid out an ultimatum: “Either they teach the dog to talk or they'd all be expelled from the city in three days time!”*

*The Jewish community was baffled and terrified... Having no choice they began to pack their bags and load their wagons... They called a meeting at the synagogue... They wrung their hands, they cried, they prayed... What to do?... What kind of insanity has gotten into the Baron?... How can they teach a dog to speak – and Russian at that!?... But the man was adamant... What to do?*

*Suddenly, Yankel the tailor stepped forward: “Let me go meet with the Baron!”*

*“You?” they exclaimed... “You're just a simple tailor!... What do you know from training dogs to talk?”... But Yankel insisted that he wanted a shot... At that point, what did they have to lose?... So off he went...*

*An hour later, Yankel the tailor comes back to the synagogue – leading Fido by his leash... He announces to the community: “Unload the wagons everyone... We are staying!”...*

*The people are flabbergasted... “What did you do?... What did you tell him?”*

*“Very simple”, he says, “I explained to him that I'd be happy to teach Fido to talk, but that he had to be fair and reasonable about this... Even a human being, who is much more intelligent than a dog, takes two years before mastering the ability to speak... For a dog, it takes at least four years!... The Baron couldn't refute my logic, so he handed me his dog so that I could get to work...”*

*“Yankel, are you mad!?... What's going to happen in four years from now when the Baron comes to you to collect his dog – expecting the animal to be talking???”*

*Yankel says: “Four years from now?... You know what can happen in four years?... Within four years time, perhaps the Baron will die... Perhaps I will die... Or perhaps the dog will die!... A lot can change in four years..... Everybody just go home and relax...”*

As the saying goes; “*Mah she-yaaseh hazman lo yaaseh hasechel* – what time can accomplish, the human intellect can never accomplish...”... Human beings can do all kinds of things to make a mess of this world, but there's only so much they can do before G-d steps in and turns things in ways nobody can anticipate... Just like very few anticipated these lows; very few know how to anticipate the highs to come... G-d can implant the right ideas in the minds of Henry Paulson or our next president and things can turn this way — or that way...

Think back to how many times you worried yourself sick about something and it all worked out. Remember Y2K? Got up – midnight, water was running, lights went on and off, my heart was still pumping...

But worry?... Worry is interest we pay on our troubles before it comes due... So don't pay up front... If we can do something about it, then – by all means – let those thoughts spring us into action and let's tackle the problem!... If there is nothing we can do to prevent it, then worrying about it is not only pointless; it's toxic!... It creates negative energy... It paralyzes us – preventing us from tackling the issues as we must... It blocks the answers and solutions from coming to the surface... **It damages our mental, emotional and physical health... It robs us of years of our lives!**... And it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy...

As the Torah Says: “G-d will bless you in all that you do”... G-d's blessings will come only if we do; if we create the vessels with which to receive those blessings... So yes, take responsibility for your life and destiny, do the best you can. But then, trust in G-d... Let go and surrender to His goodness. He's a pretty capable guy and he cares deeply about our best interest.

(Pause)

It's important to point out this: Trust in G-d – does not mean I trust that things will turn out as I want and expect them to, but that whatever is and whatever will be is ultimately what's best for me... Trust in G-d means the He has a plan that He thinks is best for me... It might not be my plan for me...

We must do the right thing... However, the results of those actions may or may not conform to our expectations... In fact, what's happening to us may seem like a terrible injustice to us, but we forge on... And how many times has it happened that we look back with hindsight and realize that our misery was wasted energy?... And things indeed ended up turning out just right... Maybe not as we had expected; but they turned out okay... sometimes even better than we had hoped for....

Our problem is that we tell G-d how to do His job – as if we know better... “Please get me my old job back”... “Please make Cisco go up ten points; Google another twenty”... “Let my mutual funds outperform all of the major indexes”..... While I understand the urge to pray that way, a much better prayer would be: ***“G-d Almighty, please do what you know will ultimately be in my best interest...”***

*One of the great Chassidic masters, Reb Boruch of Mezhibuzh, was once about to recite the Kiddush on Friday night... Many have the custom of saying the following prayer as an introduction to the Kiddush: “I thank you, G-d, for all the kindness You have done with me and for all the kindnesses that You will do with me in the future...”*



*So Reb Boruch is standing there with his Kiddush cup and he's thinking to himself: "What kind of prayer is this?... I can understand thanking G-d for the kindnesses of the past, but why do I have to thank Him in advance for the kindnesses of the future?... Why don't I just wait until such kindnesses occur – and thank Him then!?... I have to thank Him now for what He will yet do!?"*

*After a few moments of reflection, he says: "I know... It's because, chances are that at the time those kindnesses will be occurring, I won't recognize them as such... To me, those events will feel as though they're negative and distressful – bad news all the way – and I won't be the least bit grateful for them..."*

*Then Reb Boruch began to cry: "How tragic to be so shortsighted... Here G-d will be performing acts of kindness on my behalf – doing things for my own good – and instead of being grateful and appreciative, I'll be distressed and resentful!"*

Think of the mother who takes her two year old for his shots at the doctor. She assists the doctor by holding the child down so that the doctor can administer the shots. The kid is hysterical... he's looking at the doctor like some kind of monster... he's angry... the shots are the worst thing that could happen to him... he's screaming and crying hysterically. What happens immediately after it's all over? The child gets up and runs into his mother's arms for hugs and comfort... But wait a minute... wasn't she an accomplice to this whole thing? Didn't she help the doctor pull off this terribly painful experience? But somehow the child knows intuitively that mommy has only his best interest in mind. The doctor is evil, the shot are terrible, but mother loves me... Let's give G-d that same attitude. If there is motherly love in the world it is because G-d created it. He loves us at least as much as the mother loves the child. At times we don't like what's happening... we are angry at the situation, we think it's terrible. But let's not forget, He's our best friend, and is out only for our best interest.

Don't you think the mother wishes she could explain to the child the importance of the shots and why this painful thing is happening and is really good? It would make it that much easier for mommy if only she could explain everything... But she can't... I think Hashem feels the same way... He wishes he could explain His plan for us while it's happening to make things easier, but He can't... he won't get it... But ultimately it's all about our best interest, now, or years later, decades later, even generations later.

At times we see it right away. A fellow in this room today lost his job last year. It was very painful, obviously... Thankfully he landed a new job a couple months later in his field. He tells me that now, a year later, his former company merged with a much larger company and they closed down the New York office, so everyone lost their jobs. Had he still been working there he'd also have lost his job. And today it's much more difficult to land a new job because the climate of that particular business has changed drastically...

At times we don't see it right away. It's long term. Have you ever heard of Rashi, one of the most famous commentaries on the Torah. His parents were simple, unlearned people.... Why

did they merit such a son? His father was a diamond merchant. He got his hands on a huge diamond, which would have made him a fortune... he'd be set for life. He'd have his annuity... The problem was the king wanted this particular diamond to beautify the royal idol... If he'd supply the diamond it would be a violation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment... It's a big one... So what did Rashi's father do? He "accidentally" cast the precious stone into the river... He gave up a life of comfort and lived the rest of his life in a simple, humble manner... When Heaven saw this sacrifice they announced: He will be rewarded with a son who will be a diamond: he will illuminate the entire world with his commentary on Torah.

So he gave up a diamond; in return he got a son that for the past 800 years has taught Torah and given direction in life to millions of people... Was this a good tradeoff? Did he get a good deal? I think so...

(Pause)

Disclaimer – I'm not talking about real problems in life; death, illness, health issues with children G-d forbid. To be sure, they too are part of G-d's plan but it's for me to speak to that. Thank G-d I have never been given these monumental tests... Those who were chosen with these tests are heroes... G-d selected these great people knowing they could overcome these types of tests and challenges. Those of you here who have been through these types of challenges and you continue on, building a relationship with G-d and with life... you are our heroes. This is not in the purview of this discussion. I'm talking about normal – or not so normal – day to day life problems, the financial problems, or simply worrying about serious problems before they come to pass...

I also want to point out I'm not making lightly of these problems either... They are real problems and cause a lot of pain to people, including many people right here in this room who are hurting financially due to the current situation. People have lost lots of money... some have lost their job... These are not small things and I am not making light of them at all... All I'm saying is, we need to keep them in perspective...

(Pause)

*Many have you may have heard the famous story... When the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson, was being interrogated by the Communist authorities in Moscow, he refused to cooperate... He told them nothing... So one of the interrogators pointed a revolver at him and said: "This toy has a way of making people talk..."*

*To which the Rebbe responded: "That toy frightens only someone who has but one world and many gods, not someone who has one G-d and two worlds..."*

My friends, this is the bottom line... How many gods do we have and how many worlds do we have?...

If money, status, honor, prestige and material possessions are our gods... And this physical world – the here and now – is our only world; we're bound to live in a constant state of fear and anxiety... Because we're never on sure ground... Materialism – by its very nature – is fleeting... The food we ate yesterday is gone today... The money we make today will be spent tomorrow... And how much will ever be enough to make us feel secure?... The wheel of fortune keeps on turning – one day you're here, another day you're there...

On the other hand, when we have but one G-d: a G-d in heaven; and two worlds – the material and the spiritual – there is nothing to fear... We realize that there is so much more to life than the latest shift in property values or the volume of the Dow or the Nasdaq – and the confusion starts to melt away...

My friends, faith and spirituality are anchors... They are the constants in our lives.... The Torah that we study, the mitzvot we do, the charity we give, the traditions we uphold – these are eternal and unchanging... They're not “here today; gone tomorrow”.... They're “here today; with us forever”... The quality time we spend with our children and our families is more precious than any commodity on the market... These things are the central spokes of the wheel which – no matter whether you're on top or bottom – allow you to stay centered in life...

When our lives are filled with torah and mitzvot, it is easier not to forget this simple message that G-d runs the world... He cares about you and is looking out for your best interests... and therefore there's nothing to fear....

*Back in the 1970's, one of the famous Refuseniks imprisoned by the Soviets was a man named Yosef Mendelevich... He was a very proud and defiant Jew...*

*Needless to say, the conditions in the Siberian gulag were horrific... It was freezing.... The uniforms the prisoners were given to wear were cruel and sadistic – made of this thin hard material... It offered no protection from the harsh, bitter conditions... There were gaps in the seams that would allow strong winds and snow to penetrate through to the skin...*

*One day, Mendelevich decided that – come what may – he was going to start wearing a yarmulke – right there in the gulag!... What did he do?... He cut off a piece of material from his uniform and put it on his head... The guard saw this and reported it to the warden... And Mendelevich was summoned to the warden's office...*

*The warden went into this whole rant about how it was against regulations to wear a yarmulke, and how dare he deface Soviet property by cutting off a piece of his uniform?!... He then pulled his gun and barked: “Now take that off this minute!”*

*Mendelevich looked him straight in the eye and said: “You can shoot me if you want... My hand will not take it off.”*

*The warden cocked the gun... Mendeleovich didn't flinch... It was a standoff... To shoot or not shoot?... The warden knew that Mendeleovich was an internationally known prisoner of conscience... He couldn't be sure that the KGB in Moscow would be too pleased if he pulled the trigger... And he could end up being executed himself for doing something the higher-ups didn't like...*

*So he's looking at this Jew standing in front of him with this makeshift Yarmulke on his head who doesn't seem to have an ounce of fear in him... The man was thrown so off guard by the situation, he got so befuddled, he put the pistol back in its holster, went back to his desk, put his head down and started crying like a baby – right there in front of the prisoner...*

*Then he picked his head up... "Mendeleovich – What sort of human being are you?... What's with you?... Aren't you afraid to die?"...*

*Mendeleovich answered: "I don't want to die!... I want to live!... I want to get out of here.... I want to get married... I want to have children... No, I don't want to die, but you know what the difference is between you and me?... I know that death comes from G-d, who gave me life, and therefore I can accept it and not be afraid of it... You think that death comes from Brezhnev and therefore you're terrified of it..."*

How awesome... A man incarcerated and isolated to have such courage... Mendeleovich lived with the phrase "I set G-d before me at all times"... When you see G-d in front of you, you're not overcome by terror or fear – of anybody or anything...

(Pause)

My dear friends, clearly G-d's plan is not for life on a silver platter... I guess He knows, that wouldn't be in our best interest... Things might be tough right now... for some of us very tough... but let's not forget... *der aibershter firt der velt*... Someone's in charge... He is in fact in the driver's seat. He's been in charge for a very long time, and He's been doing a pretty good job. Let's do our part... and leave the rest up to Him.

Shana Tova!