

NEILLAH 5773

SERMON DELIVERD BY RABBI SHALOM M PALTIEL

CHABAD OF PORT WASHINGTON

NEILAH 5733 (2012)

THE LONGEST RUNNING SHOW IN HISTORY

I WAS VISITING JEWISH PATIENTS IN S. FRANCIS HOSPITAL SOME MONTHS BACK, WHEN I WALKED INTO THE ROOM OF AN ELDERLY JEW NAMED IRVING, A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR, WHO WAS OBVIOUSLY QUITE SICK, SURROUNDED BY HIS ENTIRE FAMILY. I SPENT SOME TIME WITH HIM. WE TALKED ABOUT THE HORRORS OF HIS YOUTH, AND HOW HE MANAGED TO CONTINUE ON LIVING. HE TOLD ME IT WAS HIS MOTHER'S WORDS TO HIM ON THE LAST NIGHT BEFORE WE WERE SEPARATED. "SHE SAT ME DOWN AND SAID TO ME: LIFE IS LIKE A PLAY. (MY MOTHER LOVED THE THEATER). EVERY ONE OF US PLAYS A PART. NOT JUST US, BUT OUR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS, THEY'RE PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS, ALL THE WAY BACK TO ABRAHAM AND SARAH. THEY'RE ALL PART OF THIS PRODUCTION. EACH OF US PLAYS A PART, AND THEN, WHEN YOUR PART IS OVER, YOU GO BACKSTAGE. YOU'RE NOT GONE, YOU'RE STILL THERE, LOOKING, CHEERING, HELPING OUT IN ANY WAY YOU CAN FROM BEHIND THE SCENES"

AND THEN MAMA GRABBED MY HAND, LOOKED ME IN THE EYE, AND SAID: "YISROLIK'LE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, HOW LONG WE'LL BE TOGETHER, WHETHER I'LL SURVIVE THIS. BUT ONE THING I ASK OF YOU, IF YOU SURVIVE. DON'T GIVE UP, PLAY YOUR PART. YOU MIGHT FEEL SAD AND LONELY, BUT I BEG OF YOU- DON'T GIVE UP. PLAY YOUR ROLE AS BEST YOU CAN. LIVE YOUR LIFE TO THE FULLEST. I PROMISE YOU, YOU WON'T BE ALONE. TATE UN ICH,

BABE UN ZEIDE, MIR VELEN ALEH ZEIN MIT DIR OIF EIBIG, DADDY AND ME, GRANDMA AND GRANDPA, WE WILL BE WITH YOU FOREVER, WE'LL BE WATCHING YOU FROM BACKSTAGE. I'M SURE YOU WON'T LET US DOWN AND YOU'LL PLAY YOUR PART." IT WAS THOSE WORDS FROM MAMA THAT GOT ME OUT OF BED ON MANY A DIFFICULT MORNING.

Now I'm gonna tell you "the rest of the story..." – but this is our little secret... This is the type of story from "a rabbi's personal diary..."

I told this story on Yom Kippur 9 years ago. As I'm saying it, I notice at the back of the Shul a young lady who used to come here, had since moved away. (Name is Orly Hacker – some of you knew her parents Max and Matti). I had heard she was engaged to marry a non-Jew, which really surprised me, knowing the traditional home they had and her own feelings about being Jewish. Ironically, her brother had also been dating a non-Jew seriously... I hadn't seen her in a number of years, she had moved to the city, now there she is sitting in my Shul.

So I add this:

I want you to understand this – I explained; especially if you're contemplating giving up on Judaism. If you've pretty much decided not to continue passing along the traditions to your children. Or if you've decided it's ok to marry out of the faith which pretty much guarantees your grandchildren, certainly their children, will no longer consider themselves Jewish...

Let me explain to you what you're about to do:

La Miz, Phantom of the Opera, Lion King, some others, compete for the longest running shows on Broadway.

Judaism is the longest running show – hands down.

It's been playing 3300 years.

(Dramatize this section):

It began at Sinai... continued in the Holy Land in the glorious days of King David and Solomon...

Then the stage moved to Babylonia and Persia... it's a travelling show

The scenery changed, but the show never stopped

Each generation continuing to play their part...

The music is playing, the lights, the scenery, the actors, the behind the scenes cheering us on

Every once in a while it seemed as if the play would be discontinued but each time it went on

In the best of times, the times of the Temples and the Talmud and the Golden Era of Spain

To the worst of times, the Inquisition, Crusaders,

The play never stopped...

It played in cities and in shtetles

In Ashkenazi communities, in Sephardic communities

In Europe and Africa

The music kept on going...

It played in ghettos and concentration camps

The lights never went out....

Come what may – our cast continued to do their part...

Even as 150 generations of their zeideh and bubbehs cheered them on from back stage...

Then it moved to this blessed republic...

The music continues, and the singing and the dancing – uninterrupted throughout it all

Then it comes to you and – SUDDENLY IT (shout): **STOPS!**

Long pause...

I looked for Orly after services that Yom Kippur but she had left already...

One of my most gratifying moments as a rabbi was two years later getting a phone call from Orly asking me to come to Israel to officiate at her wedding with a Sabbath observant doctor from NYC...

Why me? I hadn't been in touch with the family for years... Why are you schlepping me from NY?

But I knew why... "Rabbi – you remember that Yom Kippur... I was at Chabad... I decided that day not to give up on the search for my bashert... Within a month I met Michael...

I owe it all to you... that my family will not be shut out from the cast... that we'll continue to be a part of the longest running show ever!"

I emailed Orli this week to ask permission to use her name while telling the story. She emailed back:

Shalom Rabbi Paltiel!

Yes, of course! Anything it takes to save our people. No brainer. You cleared the path to my meeting my beshert, and for this I am ever grateful.

Some good news: My brother Nim recently broke off his own engagement with his shiksa, thank God. So bring on the shiduchim. He is brilliant, kind, funny, loyal and successful; deserved of a good Jewish woman with whom to build a family.

Wishing you and Sarah and the entire mishpacha a gmar chatima tova!

I hope that your sermon descends on open hearts.

Best, Orli

Dear friends,

Let's play our part...

We were entrusted with perhaps the most important part of the show

Our job is to bring the show out of the shtetls and ghettos to the free world – and still keep it going

It's a challenge our zeidies and bubbies didn't have to contend with

They're watching us from backstage and they're proud...

All they want is for us to play our part...

To keep yiddishkeit alive in our homes and in our lives...

Every actor knows you need to be completely invested and passionate about your character and your part...

Neilah when we come face to face with our Father in Heaven...

A moment the curtain is lifted a bit... each of us feels an obvious connection with the Producer...

Let's recommit to practice our lines... "Practice Judaism" a little more this year

...to be passionate about the part that we play...

None of us needs to do it all...

None of us can do all the mitzvot...

We're in it together as a gigantic cast of AM YISROEL across the world and throughout the ages

All that is asked of me is to do MY PART...

And to do it passionately, completely involved

MY mitzvah resolutions for me and my family for the NEW YEAR

That's my part...

NO ONE ELSE CAN DO THAT PART...

All lights are on me for my small, but all important part...

Neilah – one with Hashem in a room in private

Ask for His blessings for yourself – not just material but inspiration and wisdom

Ask for a friend who needs something

Ask for our entire CAST –

To be protected from those who have once again risen up with hate

Even on this very HOLY DAY OF YOM KIPPUR...

...Beloved tatteh in himel - Father in Heaven,

the director and producer

Bring about the Grand Finale

It's time...

The Redemption of the world from hate, bigotry, evil, war, illness

You promised us a day of real obvious goodness...

WHY NOT NOW?!

Once and for all – lift the curtain and let all mankind see the benevolent hand of the Great Creator... and His Master Plan completed! Amen!