

**BH**

**Sermon YISKOR 5774**

**Rabbi Shalom M Paltiel**

**Chabad of Port Washington**

**THE SECRET BEHIND THE SECRET**

**“TRACHT GUT VET ZEIN GUT”**

**(THINK GOOD & IT’LL BE GOOD)**

A man named Phil had always worked hard but had never taken even a day's vacation. He never married, and all his life worried and took care of his elderly mom and his cat. So friends and family urged him to take a big trip and get away from work. His biggest concern was his cat and who would look after the cat. And who would ensure his mother was fine. Phil's brother stepped up to the task and Phil was happily off on a long vacation.

His first day out, Phil called his brother and the first thing he asked about was the cat. The brother replied he was very sorry but the cat had died!...

Phil was devastated! How did this happen? I don't understand, he cried. The cat was healthy. I took care of it so well. I left one day and it is DEAD? His brother explained that the cat ran out to the street and it was struck by a car. Phil was crushed.

Once he finally composed himself he told his brother that he really should think about how he gives bad news to people. Since Phil was going to be gone for several weeks, he told his brother, that he could have said something like, "The cat is on the roof." In a day or so you could add "We've had trouble getting the cat down from the roof." Then a day later, you tell me, "the cat fell off the roof and died." In that way I'd know that something was up and at least I'd be a bit prepared for the news.

The brother apologized and said he would work at being more considerate in the future.

So Phil then asked about their mother. How was she?

After a pause, Phil's brother said: "Uh, Mom's on the roof."

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Jack was to the extreme in the “do not worry” camp...

Most of us however are to the other extreme. We worry far too much.

Jews love worrying

Jewish mother sends a telegram, five words: Start worrying details to follow

Do you know the difference between a Jewish pessimist and a Jewish optimist? The Jewish pessimist says, 'It can't get worse!' The Jewish optimist says 'It can!'

Let's talk about this – how unwise it is to spend life worrying too much, and the huge benefits of maintaining a positive attitude in life.

### 1. Positivity works:

#### **How Woody Woodpecker was born**

Imagine renting a nice wooden cabin in a beautiful forest for your honeymoon. The place is charming. At dawn, however, a woodpecker starts its loud rat-a-tat pounding on the roof. The noise is so loud you can't sleep. It goes on for hours. It happens at dawn the second morning, again on the third morning, and so forth. What would you do? Most people would conclude that the woodpecker ruined their honeymoon; the cabin experience was a failure.

This woodpecker incident actually happened, to a couple named Gracie and Walter Lantz on their honeymoon. However, instead of deciding that the cabin was a failure, they changed their thinking and asked, "What if it's a success? What if the woodpecker is an opportunity, a possibility? The only thing left to do is to find the opportunity." By the time they had returned from their honeymoon they found it. It became a huge commercial success. We all know it. They created the cartoon character Woody Woodpecker. Walter was the illustrator, Gracie the voice. Many years later, when interviewed on their 50th wedding anniversary, Gracie said, "It was the best thing that ever happened to us."

If Gracie and Walter had become upset and decided that the cabin vacation was a failure, it *would* have been a failure.

But because they said it was a success, *it became* a success.

As story illustrates:

Positive thinking doesn't mean being delusional or in denial  
You gotta do whatever it takes to turn things around. Work hard, use all possible resources etc.  
But see the positive side to things.

## **Met Life Study**

In his book, *Learned Optimism*, Seligman describes a remarkable experimental observation about the power of optimism. Recognizing that out of all professional disciplines, the field of sales requires an extraordinary degree of willingness to overcome rejection, Seligman met with the executives of Metropolitan Life, one of the leading insurance companies in America.

At the time, Metropolitan Life administered a standardized test to anyone who applied for sales jobs. The test focused on intelligence and inherent aptitude for salesmanship, and rejected those applicants with low scores. Seligman suggested, however, that a second series of tests be administered, one geared toward people's attitudes about rejection; this test was not about intellectual ability, but rather whether one approached rejection as permanent, or temporary and limited. He further proposed that a team of salesmen who failed the original intelligence tests but registered as being optimistic in nature be formed in parallel with the group hired based on the conventional method.

The results were striking.

The optimists who had initially been rejected outsold the pessimists in the regular force by 21 percent during the first year. And in the second year by 57 percent! You see, not only were the optimists better salesmen, their performance kept improving over the wiser pessimists. The reason, Seligman explains, is that while intelligence should initially be at least as important as persistence and optimism, over time, as the mountain of no's accumulated, persistence becomes the decisive factor. Optimism works.

## **Set Your Sails**

What determines the direction of a ship at sea? Is it the direction of the wind, or the set of the sails?

The sails determine the direction. No matter what direction the wind is blowing, you can sail in the direction you wish. The wind carries one ship east and another west according to the way that you set your sails.

The sea is your life and you are the captain. The sails are your thoughts. Your thoughts, positive or negative, really do change the direction of your life. You are the captain of your own destiny. Regardless of which way the winds are blowing, you can set your sails in the right direction (and avoid going south...)

## The Secret

Many of you are familiar with “The Secret” – The 2006 film and best-selling self-help book which concludes: Thoughts Become Things

**The Rebbe, Rabbi Schneerson of righteous memory, my mentor and teacher, said it this way: Tracht gut vet zein gut – think good and it’ll be good**

More than 20 volumes have been published of the Rebbe’s personal correspondence with people. One reason the collection fascinates me is because it includes letters to an extraordinary, eclectic assortment of personalities. Writers, artists, philosophers, scientists, musicians, rabbis, rebels, athletes, presidents and journalists.

The result of the collection is a glimpse into the expansive nature of one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century.

When people wrote to the Rebbe about their struggles and shattered dreams, he would give them specific and practical advice.

But I noticed one key phrase appeared more than any other in those letters, and it is:

**“Tracht gut vet zain gut.” Think good and it will be good.**

### **He knew the secret**

He quoted Jewish sources going back 900 years to Nachmanidies... It’s also been quoted in classical Jewish sources dating back more 2000 years (apparently we’ve known “The Secret” for a long time, well before the 2006 revelation...)

## **2. The Secret behind The Secret**

The Rebbe didn’t just speak about the secret. He explained “The Secret behind The Secret – why does optimism work?”

Firstly - Heaven is like a mirror to us.

You put a smiley face forth – that’s what Heaven will give back to you

Also - Real optimism means **you trust in G-d, so G-d comes through for you!**

Like any good person... If you're not counting on me, I don't feel responsible. But if you're counting on me, I gotta come through for you...)

### **Story of 500 Guilder**

An arrogant businessman named Goldfarb, from Berlin, was on the way to a big business deal in Krakow. It was getting dark and night travel in those days was impossible. He looked for a Jewish inn where he could spend the evening.... and he found one.

It was an old, run-down-looking place but when he got inside he saw it wasn't so bad. Here and there the plaster was falling off and the paint was peeling but that was par for course.

When the owner saw a businessman enter he grabbed the opportunity and showed him the 'best' room which was out of the price range of his usual customers; no cracked walls, no peeling paint etc.

Goldfarb, of course, agreed and took the room but about a half-hour later as he was just settling down for the night there was a light knock at his door and someone pushed it open. It was the owner and he looked desperate. He closed the door behind him and spoke quickly almost in a whisper.

'Excuse me... please.... Listen.... err... I'm very sorry to ask you this... but you see a very important guest has arrived. Very important! It's .... Rabbi Dovid of Tolna, a great Tzadik (sage and pious man)!' He was pleading and his wife silently appeared behind him as well as he continued. "Please.... I apologize but it is very important to me, to us. He is a very holy man! Could you please... that is..... move to the next room. It isn't as nice as this one but it is clean and... I won't even take money if you want."

Goldfarb said he had no problem moving and would pay for the other room whatever it was worth. But in his heart he didn't understand what the urgency was. Holy people are supposed to be removed from the world; holy people are supposed to only care about G-d. If this Rabbi Dovid was such a holy person then what did he care where he slept? He could understand if he was a great scholar or an important person... but a righteous man?

He peeked out the door and saw the Holy Jew come up the stairs and, to tell the truth, he didn't look so impressive. But then he entered the room took a chair and the hotel owner and his wife stood before him and asked for a blessing for success and children Goldfarb moved to the side of the slightly opened door and listened.

The rabbi spoke in a loud voice so it was unmistakable that he said. "You want success and children? I need you to give five hundred guilder to help marry off an orphaned bride!"

“Five hundred?!” Whispered Goldfarb to himself... “Why that is a fortune....a life’s earnings!! Where....?”

Suddenly the owner’s wife said to the rabbi. “Five hundred Guilder? Why that is a fortune! It’s all we have!! Can’t we give less? Honorable Rabbi, what about one hundred?”

“No!” answered the rabbi firmly. “Five hundred and not a penny less!”

And so the negotiation continued for several minutes until the woman finally agreed to give what he asked. Her husband rushed from the room and moments later he returned and counted out the money.

“What a highway robber!” Goldfarb thought to himself in disgust. “Incredible! Simply incredible! He took the food out of their mouths!!”

He went outside to smoke a cigar and contemplate what just happened.

Moments after he took the first puffs ... who came out but the ‘Tzadik’ Reb Dovid accompanied by an assistant that must have been waiting in the lounge for him. He began walking slowly, hands behind his back, eyeing the hotel from outside and talking aloud.

“Look at this place we’re staying in; what a dump! The architects that made it were really fools. Look!” he pointed up, “There should be at least another three floors and the place should be wider with bigger rooms. And here there should be a stable for horses so the noblemen would come here for vacations. And look at the grounds, like a garbage dump. There should be a picnic area over there.”

“Why,” Thought Goldfarb, “This man is no Tzadik! He’s a businessman. Look how he’s talking! Disgusting!”

The next morning Goldfarb paid for his room and left, but the experience left a bad taste in his mouth. Now he understood; all the so-called Tzadikim (=holy people) were charlatans! Each and every one!!!

Ten years passed. One day on a business trip Mr. Goldfarb happened to pass through the same town again. But this time he noticed the place had changed. For one thing the little hotel was gone and in its place stood a few many-storied buildings. Suddenly the door of one of the buildings opened and out comes the hotel owner, his wife and several small children all well dressed and smiling from ear to ear. Everything the rabbi had mentioned – had come to fruition!

Goldfarb realized he had made a big mistake. He travelled to visit the holy rabbi and asked his forgiveness. The Tzadik smiled, assured him that he was justified in having doubts, and there was nothing to worry about.

“Please explain one thing to me though. Why did you have to take every penny they had? After all, it was all their life’s savings. Couldn’t you have given the same blessing for less? Or for free? Why did you have to take everything they had?”

“Certainly” replied Reb Dovid. “I could have blessed them for free. But it wouldn’t have worked. You see, they saved it up and thought of it every day of their lives and it became their hope, trust and soul. They really believed ‘This money will save us. This money will help us, provide for us, comfort us and give us life! Those 500 guilder were their god.

“I could have given them the blessing but they couldn’t have received it! They were too imprisoned by that 500 guilder. When they no longer had the 500 guilder to rely upon, they now truly relied on G-d. So He came through for them and granted them their blessing.”

**Tracht Gut vet Zein Gut! – think good, that itself will make that it will be good**

**By thinking good, you’re effectively telling G-d – hey big Boss, I’m leaving this in Your hands, I trust you. And He’ll come through!**

**But Rabbi I have faith, still I find it very difficult not to worry, I find it difficult to be positive...**

**I said TRUST – not FAITH... they’re not the same thing...**

**Faith = Believe G-d exists, is the Creator and is in charge.**

**Trust = I can trust Him... He’s got my back...**

### **Riding His Wheelbarrow**

The famous tightrope walker "the Great Blondin," stretched a high wire over Niagara Falls. He initially took hold of a balance beam and walked across with little hesitation.

A crowd started to form below. Then the tightrope walker discarded the balance beam and walked back across the high wire. The people below cheered as they witnessed this tremendous feat.

The famous tightrope walker followed this accomplishment by running across the high wire strategically placed about Niagara Falls. The people cheered even more and cried out: "You are the greatest tightrope walker in the world!"

Next came an amazing stunt. The tightrope walker pushed a wheelbarrow over the high wire, successfully getting to the other side. The crowd went wild. They clapped and cheered even louder. Then the tightrope walker called down to the people below, "Who will get into the wheelbarrow?"

There was silence. Then some mumbling could be heard. Finally, a spokesman for the group responded, "We know that you are the greatest tightrope walker in the whole world. We agree to this fact. There is consensus among us. But nobody is willing to get into the wheelbarrow."

They had faith, but not trust.

We all have faith. Of course... But trust? Do we actually put our TRUST in HASHEM? That's the task at hand, that's where I'd like us to try to go for this New Year, to endeavor to move from FAITH TO TRUST. To get into G-d's wheelbarrow.

A story is told of four women who weren't blessed with children after many years of marriage. All four together travelled to Miron, the resting place of the holy sage RASHBI, in honor of Lag B'Omer. Everyone knows, praying at Miron on that special day is magical for being granted the blessing of children. A year passed. Two of the women had given birth. The other two had not. Why? They went to their rabbi. After some discussion it was realized – that while all four had prayed fervently and had complete faith in G-d's power to bless them, only two had actually gone out and purchased a baby carriage... They were the ones to be blessed. They didn't merely have faith... They had TRUST.

It is like the community that assembled in the town square to pray for rain. They prayed fervently and wondered why it didn't work. Until the rabbi pointed out... no-one had brought an umbrella...

Sidney Livingston, our own local miracle... Why did they merit this sort of miracle? And a miracle on numerous levels – she survived. Plus she survived, not as a vegetable... That would have been "dayeinu". Plus she is back to herself, able to walk and talk (and do handstands...) Plus she is the same Sidney, in her personality, with all of her mental and emotional capacities intact. It's a whole series of miracles! I've asked Scott and Dianne why they were blessed with such miraculous treatment. They said simply: We never stopped trusting in G-d. They tolerated absolutely zero negativity, only optimism and trust in G-d!

This doesn't mean they sat on their hands and just waited for the miracles to happen. These two people are balls of fire... They jumped into action. They didn't leave any stone unturned and then some... bringing in the absolute best in medical care and consulting with the greatest experts in the field, etc.

Real faith and trust in G-d doesn't mean inaction. On the contrary. Because one has solid faith and trust, they jump into action, with that much more passion. Because they know G-d is behind them, blessing their efforts.



### **3. How to I go from FAITH TO TRUST?**

*“But Rabbi – I believe in G-d, absolutely, always did... But TRUST? How can I trust Him... He doesn't always come through.*

*He doesn't have a perfect track record... How can I get into His wheelbarrow in the off chance I'll be the one to fall out?!*

Dear Friends- We go from faith to trust through meditating and realizing one simple point, one that is often overlooked:

*G-d's job isn't only to deal with problems that arise. He isn't only responsible for problem solving. He makes all the good stuff happen too!*

Let me explain.

#### **Referee or Quarterback:**

We think of G-d as the referee... He stands at the sidelines and doesn't get involved in the game, unless there's a mishap, something goes wrong, now we need Him to intervene.

Truth is – He's not the referee – He's the quarterback... He makes all the plays happen. He moves the entire game forward. He sets it all up for us.

If He's just the referee, if His job is just to intervene when there's a problem, His track record is OK, but far from perfect...

For every 10 car accidents, there are a few serious injuries, even a fatality

For every 10 cases of serious illness, there are a few who don't survive

So He's ok... but He hardly deserves my trust.

But if I realize He's not the referee... He's the quarterback... He makes everything happen

The fact that I can see, walk, talk, think – He did that

The opportunities that have come my way in life – He made it happen

The guy I “happened” to meet through a friend of a friend who now became my biggest client – It’s His doing

How I met my wife and my life is so blessed – He pulled it off

Watching my children come into the world, with 10 fingers and 10 toes... all the veins, arteries exactly in place, each blessed with their own special gift of personality, smarts, wit, sense of humor... all are miracles that He pulled off

When I begin to give Him credit for all the good stuff happening in my life EACH AND EVERY DAY

And that’s just me. Multiply that by 6 billion

And that’s just in human race. Add to that the countless things from stars and planets to birds and butterflies and everything in between, each being created, nurtured and provided for

**He’s got a darn good record.**

**He’s good 99.9999999 percent of the time**

**He deserves my trust – you’d invest every dollar you had on His stock - any day of the week**

**Yes there is the rare occasion** when He decides that things should NOT turn out good... At times we see in the not too distant future how it turned out to be for the best in the end. At times we don’t see it in our lifetimes. And we don’t know the answer to that question. No one knows the answer to this mystery. **Even Moses was told – you can’t see My face, only my back** – meaning the answer to this greatest of questions – only to be understood at the time of Moshiach. The Kaballah tells us that at times G-d chooses the greatest souls and asks them to carry burdens that are beyond the ability of the human capacity to carry. And these special gigantic souls carry His burden for Him. For reasons understood only by Him. All true.

But the odds are on His side. 99.999999 percent of the time...

***This is the problem friends – of why we’re stuck on faith and can’t graduate to trust –***

***We judge His work based on how He deals with crises, not realizing EVERYTHING is HIS DOING! ALL THE GOOD – it’s HIS DOING.***

My wife Sara pointed out to me that there are two plaques hanging in our Chabad’s lobby – the Salzbank Yahrzeit Board and the Ruben Simcha Tree. Notice, the Yahrzeit plaque is full, the Simcha Tree is still empty... As Sara pointed out, we think of Him when something goes wrong. Someone died – we gotta put their name on the plaque, do something G-dly... Had a simcha?

Baby was born, marriage, graduation, promotion? That's normal stuff, He had nothing to do with that...

Like my Leibel (and kids...) says when I don't tell him a story one night: "You never tell us a bed time story..." or "You never let us have ice cream". The majority of times that you say yes they don't count. That's how it ought to be. The one time you say no, and suddenly it's "you never..."

**We're like that kid, towards G-d...**

**Friends – begin to train yourself to think of all your blessings as coming from Him –**

**Make a list of these, every day, or once a week, whatever it takes for you**

**Begin to really "count your blessings"**

**I'm telling you - it'll change your life – you'll never worry again! You'll know you're in good hands!**

Years ago, when my daughter Mushka was about 3 years old, she was having a problem because she was afraid of the dark. She was afraid to go to sleep at night. She was afraid of the bad guys hiding under her bed.... One day the problem resolved itself. We were driving in the minivan and I was on the telephone. I was distracted and talking to Sara and there's a children's music tape (by singer Chaim Fogelman) playing. The singer is singing a song that says "*Hashem* (G-d) lives with me inside my room." Suddenly, I hear Mushka laughing in the back of the minivan and she says, "Tatty, Tatty, did you hear what he said? Hashem lives with me inside my room! That's great, I have nothing to be afraid of because the bad guys won't be able to come there because *Hashem* is there." She immediately got on the phone with Sara and excitedly told her the same thing. From then on she had zero fear because *Hashem* was in her room.

Isn't that beautiful? The trust, the faith of a child. G-d wants us to be that child. It's right on the dollar bill, "In God we Trust". We all have faith, we all believe in G-d, that's why we're here at Shul today. But we need to take the faith and turn it into trust. G-d really is in the room. Not just somewhere out in heaven running the vast universe, but with us in our daily lives giving us a true sense of security and comfort.

Friends, this is the greatest quality of life one can expect and this is what everyone is looking for. The one thing everyone wants is quality of life. People travel the world; spend any amount of money just to get little quality of life. And it's easy. It's easily available for free in your home. All you need is to build a strong relationship with Hashem, a real sense of TRUST, recognizing that G-d is literally with you – He has your back - and life will be much more peaceful and enjoyable.

Dear friends,

**In order that we remember this important message year round, Michael and Adelle Greiff graciously donated something, as a gift to each of you. Please look for the slapstick – planted someplace in your seat... it reads:**

***TRACHT GUT VET ZEIN GUT***

Please put it on (so you don't carry it on Yom Kippur)\*

**THE REBBE & THE ROSH**

In conclusion – a story that took place just a couple days ago:

I walk into the house, Sara is on the phone in the kitchen surrounded by a number of our children – the bottom half of the lineup...

(I have a new line when people ask why we have ten kids – why so many? I say: We only have one of each...)

And Sara's crying hysterically... To the point that she can't speak... I begin to panic... "No, shalom, it's all good, it's amazing..." sobbing... I'm wondering – what could be so amazing...

She had called our son Mendel who is studying in Yeshiva in Los Angeles, when she heard sounds of music and celebration in the background. Mind you, this is not typical during this time of year between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. So she asks what it's all about.

Mendel explains the situation. The dean of the Yeshiva is a well-known scholar by the name of Rabbi Schochet – known affectionately the world over simply as: The Rosh (as in Rosh Hashanah... he's simply head and shoulders above his peers in terms of his scholarship. And his heart matches his mind as well. I had the privilege of studying under him in the early 80's).

So the Rosh's granddaughter - Mushka Spalter – the daughter of his daughter Hadasah, had become ill some months back. The entire Yeshiva, and the entire LA, had been praying for this little sweet girl running around town with the kerchief on her head...

Everyone despaired. Except for Hadassah, the girl's mother. Her faith was unshakable. No matter what reports she got from the doctors, she knew Hashem would come through for her.

This was near the spine... Doctors tried to prepare her... The case was not fully understood, not a common thing. They sent the case from Kaiser Hospital to cancer centers across the country, all the experts said it's the real thing... this is bad.

During Rosh Hashanah, the ROSH, the girl's grandfather, led the services. He creid like a baby throughout.

That night, he has a dream – the Rebbe comes to him and says – in Yiddish:

**Vos bistu azoi fardaighet - Why are you so worried –  
Hadassah tracht gut – vet zicher zein gut – Hadassah thinks good, so surely it'll be good**

Surgery was scheduled for this Tuesday, immediately after Rosh Hashanah.

They go in – and it's gone, it's nothing... The doctors give Mushka'le a clean bill of health...

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**YISKOR – our loved ones coming from the world of truth**

**Why do they come...**

**They come to comfort us in the world of challenge...**

**They come to reassure us that life doesn't end, it only continues**

**They come to tell us that they're OK**

**And that they never stop thinking about us and our families and our wellbeing for even one moment...**

**They come to shower us with their love and their blessings for the New Year for health, happiness and prosperity**

**Most of all – I think they come to reassure us**

**They how much we worry, and obsess and lose sleep**

**They did the same shtick when they were here**

**And they come to reassure us –**

**"Kinderlach – they say**

**Vos bistu azoi fardaighet - Why are you so worried (or in any other language they speak)**

**Tracht gut vet zein gut" – think good it'll be good**

**Enjoy every day, every moment**

**We're here for you because we love you and don't stop thinking about you for even a moment**

**And kinderlach – gedenkt – always remember**

**You're never alone**

**HASHEM – the Father of all of us... Who loves you as much as we do, maybe more**

**He doesn't stop thinking about you for even a moment**

**He's always planning for your future, for ways to give you blessings and opportunities and successes**

**HASHEM, HE LIVES WITH YOU INSIDE YOUR ROOM...**

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\*The slapsticks were given over by way of 'kinyan' to a third party on behalf of the congregation in order to allow for gift giving on the holiday, in accordance with the instructions of a Halachic authority