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**Sermon by Rabbi Shalom Paltiel
Delivered at Chabad of Port Washington**

Rosh Hashanah Day 1, 5774

You're a ROYAL!

A tour bus driver is driving with a bus load of seniors down a highway when he is tapped on his shoulder by a little old lady. She offers him a handful of peanuts, which he gratefully munches up. After about 15 minutes, she taps him on his shoulder again and she hands him another handful of peanuts. She repeats this gesture about five more times. When she is about to hand him another batch again he asks the little old lady, "Why then don't you eat the peanuts yourself?".

"We can't chew them because we've no teeth," she replied.

The puzzled driver asks, "Why do you buy them then?"

The old lady replied, "We love the chocolate on the outside."

Wish you all a sweet year –

G-d should give us not just the nuts but also the chocolate!

THE MAYOR

This year, Americans, especially New Yorkers, marked the passing of Mayor Ed Koch, New York's Mayor for Life.

Liked him or not, definitely a special man with his own unique style

"How am I doin'..."

The big story – his tomb stone

He worked on it for over a year, wrote and spoke publicly about it for years

They still got it wrong... 1942 instead of 1924

Then of course there's the famous inscription on the stone

"My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish"

The word uttered by Daniel Pearl before he was murdered by an Islamic Terrorist

What do Ilan Ramon, Ed Koch and Daniel Pearl have in common?

3 secular Jews who proclaimed for the whole world to see their pride in being Jewish:

Ilan Ramon - first Israeli astronaut

Ramon requested that NASA provide him with a kosher diet

Proudly Took along Torah scroll which survived Bergen Belsen

Daniel Pearl - American-Jewish journalist murdered in Pakistan proudly proclaimed as his last words: "My father is Jewish. My mother is Jewish. I am Jewish."

And Mayor Koch who decided to have those very words engraved on his headstone

They have something else in common – which you may not know

All three died on the same date -

Ilan Ramon – died when the Space Shuttle Columbia disintegrated as it was returning to earth –

Date: February 1, 2003

Daniel Pearl said those famous words which continue to reverberate around the world just before being brutally beheaded by an Islamic Terrorist –

Date: February 1, 2002

Mayor Edward I Koch had these words immortalized on his tombstone –

Date of death: February 1, 2013

Coincidence? I don't think so...

How do we explain this staunch Jewish identity expressed by these three secular Jews? Why would these three secular Jews who hardly ever walked into a synagogue become so stubbornly proud of their Jewishness?!

I know – Jews tend to be proud... but honestly – it's got to make some sense.

None of these guys were religious Jews, and that's an understatement

Suddenly when it comes right down to it – when they're about to make history

When the whole world is watching –

They shout from the rooftops: I'm a JEW!

Why is it suddenly so important to them?!

Analyze Koch's headstone:

Edward I Koch

Mayor of the City of New York 1978-1989

"My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish"

Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One

Shma yisroel hashem elokeinu hashem echad

"He was fiercely proud of his Jewish faith. He fiercely defended the City of New York, and he fiercely loved its people. Above all, he loved his country, the United States of America, in whose armed forces he served in World War II."

I mean – being Jewish is important to him, but look where he's putting it

On par with things so central to his life as being Mayor of NYC that he loved and fighting for America...

This is important stuff – this is what his life is all about... right in the middle he throws in – and mind you more lines are dedicated to this part –

“My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish”

How much of his time and attention was dedicated to his commitment to his city and country?

How much of his time and attention was dedicated to his Jewishness?

Do the two even come close?

Suddenly this becomes the bottom line

Same with Pearl and Ramon

How do you explain this?

PRINCE GEORGE

All summer I kept on reading about baby Prince George

All Jewish yentes are busy proving he’s Jewish

To us Jews everyone famous must be Jewish...

As kids, we were big baseball fans

My big brother had me convinced **Greg Nettles** at 3rd base – for sure he’s Jewish

Look how smart he is... he plays like a yiddisher kup the way he spins around to throw the guy out at first... C’mon Shalom...

Babe Ruth...

Mickey Mantle... Of course...

Even Hank Aaron...

had epes ah Jewishe zeideh on his father’s side

Cy Young - we were convinced his real name was Chaim Yankel...

So Prince George – of course he’s Jewish...I’m good with it. (It might even be true...)

The entire world had been counting down to his arrival

For months British gamblers bet over 1 million pounds on the day of his debut.

People from all over the world had gathered outside to await news of the birth.

At last, on July 22, 2013, at 4:24 p.m. the boy was born.

He weighed 8 lbs 6 oz.

Crowds erupted in cheers.

In an interview a few days ago, the proud father spoke of his new son, now a few weeks old:

“He is a bit of a rascal who does not sleep well and needs to have his diaper changed far too often.”

Of course! The entire summer of 2013 “belonged” to this child: Little Prince George was born to Kate Middleton and Prince William. Third in line to the throne of England, the infant prince has captured the imagination of millions.

Forgive me for my heretical question: Can you explain to me why CNN—and another 4000 media outlets—feel that viewers living in NY are interested in how many pounds this baby weighs? Or what type of diapers he wears? And do I really have to know whether his mother will be a hands-on-mom or she is searching for a Nanny?

And why when my Tzivia was born (and she’s adorable... poo poo poo) did 5,000 people not stand outside when Sara delivered?

Why doesn’t CNN report that we use Huggies?

Am I chopped liver?

You’re looking at me strangely. Rabbi, with all due respect, you are just another rabbi. George, in contrast, is not an ordinary child.

He is [loud!] A ROYAL CHILD,

An heir to the throne of Great Britain.

He is already known as “His Royal Highness Prince George of Cambridge.”

Rabbi, with all due respect, the majestic blood of the kings and queens of the House of Windsor flow in his sinews.

Every move he makes, and every breath he takes, makes headlines, it’s “news fit to print”

He is not just another shlemazal on the street;

George is a royal – he’s a FUTURE KING.

Lesson – a royal is a royal – royalty is hereditary, it’s an essential value that’s there right at birth before you’ve done anything special. You don’t become more of a royal over time, you’re as royal as you’re gonna be.

Dear friends, a Jew is a Jew –half the world’s population acknowledges us to be a “kingdom of princes and a holy nation”... The royal blood of our patriarchs and matriarchs is running in your sinews... it’s an essential value which is who you are at birth before you do anything Jewish. You don’t become more Jewish over time. You’re as Jewish as you’re gonna be.

Not just a Jew – a ROYAL... after-all, much of today’s values - human rights, freedom, respect for each individual life, charity, much of the ideals upon which this blessed republic were founded, were gifted to the world by our Patriarchs and Matriarchs. If that’s not royalty – what is?!

This is true for the sincere convert too – the children of Abraham!

The Rebbe taught us, over and over again: A Jew is a Jew is a Jew. The secular Jew is as Jewish as Moses and Maimonides.

When it comes right down to it – when it really counts - it’s very important to him to be known as someone “born as a Jew and died as a Jew”

Someone once said:

Jews are religious without knowing it

Let me illustrate it

If you ask someone coming out of church on a Sunday, "Do you believe in G-d?" the worshipper is shocked. "What type of question is that? Of course I do!"

If you go to a mosque on Friday and you ask the average person there, "Do you believe in G-d?" They'll kill you on the spot. Of course they do!

Now go to a synagogue on Yom Kippur. Ask the Jew sitting in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, fasting, "Do you believe in G-d?"

"Umm, it depends what you mean by 'G-d'."

"I don't know, I'm not a philosopher"

So then ask them, "Do you consider yourself religious?" Have you ever asked an American Jew if they're religious? They crack up laughing. And they assure you that they're the furthest things from religious. "Are you kidding? Do you know what I eat for breakfast?"

Then every one of them will say, "I had a grandfather, on my mother's side, oh, that was a religious man. But me...?"

So you ask what appears to be a logical question. "Then why are you here?"

For some reason, this average Jew, who doesn't believe in G-d and is very not religious, will look at you like you're crazy and say, "What do you mean? It's Yom Kippur!"

MELBOURNE STORY

When I was a student in Melbourne at the Rabbinical College of Australia, a young man Mark came in one day, was from the Australian outback, never had a Bar Mitzvah, knew absolutely nothing about Judaism. He had recently moved to Melbourne after his grandfather passed away. On his deathbed zeideh told the family to remember they're Jewish and that they were

descendants of King David. The yeshiva boys talked, told him how special an ancestry he had, showed tehllim which king david wrote etc. Greg began coming every morning for davening and to shmooze with the boys. While we davened he'd sit there with his English Hebrew tehllim. He'd read quietly but fervently, with emotion and passion, often with tears rolling down his cheeks. We finally asked him how he's so moved, a kid who knew absolutely nothing about being Jewish until very recently, moved much more so than we yeshiva student were in our prayers. Grabbing the book of psalms he shouted: **"what do you mean – this book... it was written by MY GREANDFATHER"**

To a Jew being Jewish is not a religious choice, it's who we are, it's mishpocho.

Its family, the book was written by our grandfather... its not some kind of Bible or religion... it's our family album!

Estate Sale story:

(Click here for details of story along with photos of the children & woman involved:

http://www.chabadpw.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1798484/jewish/A-Strange-Estate-Sale-Transaction.htm)

A colleague of mine, a Chabad rabbi in Miami, walks into estate sale.

The owner is an elderly woman and her children

In the middle were a ceramic matzah dish and two brass candlesticks. I didn't pay much attention to them at the time.

I began to feel some sadness; all these items comprised 50–60 years of memories. Now those memories were laid out for all to see and buy.

Eventually I found something to buy just to make the owners happy.

On the way out, the older woman, the owner of the house, wished me “Good Shabbos.”

As soon as I left, I realized I had missed an opportunity. I couldn’t stop thinking about those candlesticks

I stopped at the bakery and picked up a fresh *challah* and wine. I picked up the children from school and told them the mission

We came back - Whew! The candlesticks were still there!

I searched for the older woman, and asked her if the candlesticks were for sale.

“Eight dollars for the pair”

“Deal”

The son went to the table, took the candlesticks and put them in my hands.

“Here!”

I held them, my kids watching my every move. I then turned to the mother, looked her softly in the eye and spoke.

“Do you know why I came all the way back and bought these candlesticks?”

“No.”

“I came back together with my children to buy them from you, so we can give them back to you. We want these candlesticks to stay in your dining room, continuing to illuminate your home every Friday and holiday night.”

Tears welled up in her eyes.

Mine soon followed.

Our daughter Hindy gave her the bag with the candles and glass holders.

Moishy gave her the *challah*.

Chana gave her the wine.

The woman’s son and daughter froze, tears welled up in their eyes

They used to do this every Friday night...

There were hugs and tears between them. "We used to light these years ago" ... Even the strangers rummaging through the estate items stopped to stare

She warmly accepted our gift, and assured us that she "already knows the *beracha* (blessing)."

Moral of the story:

When you give a Jew a Shabbos candle, you're not giving them anything new. You're giving them back their own candles!

When you pick up a pair of tefillin and put them on, it's already yours! It's been in your family for 100 generations!

When you go to shul – you're simply going home

When you talk to G-d in prayer – you're talking to your father

When you study Torah or celebrate Shabbat-

You're not trying something new... some religious activity

You're taking back what's already yours! You're re-claiming your birthright!

SHMA RESOLUTION

My dear friends, the Mayor reminded us that we're Jewish from the beginning to the end

He also made a point of inscribing the SHMA – the essence of Jewishness

The take away I want to suggest – something I talked about a number of years ago during a high holiday sermon:

I asked that each of you take upon yourself to cover your eyes and recite the Shma - the six words Shma Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad

Twice daily, morning and evening

People have told me over the years that they've been doing it

If you've been doing it all along, keep it up!

If not, today's a good day to start – it's a new year

It's a 10 second proclamation of my Jewishness – each morning and night

It's a statement that no matter how much or how little I practice my Jewishness, it's really important to me, it's the very essence of who I am

And maybe I WILL do more as a Jew this year. After all – it's who I am

We wonder why the media is so overly obsessed with the Jews and Israel – a tiny state, a speck of dust on the globe, yet always in the headlines. You're thinking, of course, Anti-Semitism...

Let me give it to you with a positive spin:

The same reason 4000 media outlets were obsessed with little Prince George even before he was born -

My dear friend, you're a royal child,

The majestic blood of Abraham Isaac Jacob, Sarah Rebecca Rahcel & Leah flow in your sinews.

Every move you make, and every breath you take, makes headlines, it's "news fit to print"

You're a royal

Heir to the royal house of Israel –a "kingdom of princes and a holy nation"

Charged with the mission of being a light onto the nations and bringing heaven to earth

We all know the phrase TIKUN OLAM. It comes from the torah phrase: Letakein olam Bmalchut Shaddai - to fix the world, to bring healing and redemption to the world – bmalchut shadai – through introducing the royal kingdom of His majesty, Al-Mighty G-d, our beloved Father in Heaven!

Ladies & Gentlemen -

Your Honor -

Your Majesty –

Shana Tova!



EDWARD I. KOCH

DECEMBER 12, 1942 — FEBRUARY 1, 2013



MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK 1978 - 1989

"My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish."
(Daniel Pearl, 2002, just before he was beheaded by a Muslim terrorist.)

HEAR, O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.

שמע ישראל יי אלהינו יי אחד

He was fiercely proud of his Jewish faith. He fiercely defended the City of New York.
Above all, he loved his country, the United States of America, in whose name