

BH

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

Rosh Hashanah Day 2, 5774

Judaism is More than Social Action

A 5 year old girl asked her mom at synagogue: Why is it so important that we are absolutely quiet during the rabbi's sermon?

"Because people are sleeping" came the reply...

The new Rabbi was in the middle of a sermon when he suddenly beckoned to the president to come over. The rabbi said to him, "That man in the third row is asleep. Wake him up."

The president replied, "You put him to sleep. YOU wake him up!"

One of the most common questions I get as a rabbi:

Do I really have to observe Judaism and these rituals? Can't I just be a good person?!

I was talking with a father about giving his son a Jewish education –

"Rabbi - that's not what's important to me. I just want to make sure they know what it means to be a Jew:

Be kind to others

Be honest in business

Protect the environment"

Me: And a non-Jew is supposed to be mean, dishonest and destructive to the environment?

"Of course ... but you know what I mean..."

I want my son to have Jewish values”

Me: What are you saying – being a decent, honest human being is Jewish values? You just insulted all of humanity!

“You know what I mean rabbi... I just want him to be a mentch”

Me: omg - it’s getting worse by the minute

So being a mentch is now a Jewish thing? No one else are mentches?

Again - you’re insulting 6 billion people

Of course all of the above is important

In fact – it’s first order of business, to teach our children the importance of honesty, being a good person, being kind to people

I for one have no patience for Jews who are pious when it comes to G-d and dishonest to their fellow human beings

In fact being honest in business is rule #1

Jews are known for smart business tactics...

JOKE –

Wealthy man calls together the rabbi, the priest and the minister.

He offers to give each a million dollars for their respective parish, on the condition they return it to him at his death by coming to the funeral and placing it into his open grave. They all agree.

Years pass. The man dies. They all three show up at the graveside.

Priest: Our church desperately needed new carpet for the sanctuary, so I took off \$50,000, I’m sure he’ll understand. But the 950k is here – drops it into the grave.

Minister: We needed a new roof. It was absolutely a necessity. So it cost us \$100,000. I'm returning the 900k – drops it into the grave.

Rabbi: One must be honest and keep their word. I promised to return the entire million dollars, that's exactly what I'm going to do, not even one dollar less. Rabbi writes out a personal check for a million bucks and throws it into the grave...

At times our smart Yiddishe kup (Jewish mind) gets us into trouble and we take things a bit far in terms of outsmarting others. No excuse for that...

Michael Ehrenpreis tells me about a particular religious Jew, a pious guy with beard and hat and all, who is totally dishonest when it comes to business.

(IMPORTANT NOTE: Michael has lots of wonderful and honest clients who are religious Jews. He also has non-religious Jews and non-Jews who are difficult and dishonest... so let's not fall into the trap of stereotyping religious Jews as dishonest. It's what our enemies did to us Jews...)

I told Michael – here's how you deal with Mr Pious:

Remind him that the first question they ask when you come to heaven – not if you davened or made Kiddush but: were you honest in your business dealings!

Then I made a suggestion – bring a ham and cheese sandwich to the next meeting and offer it to him. Explain – the same G-d who commanded kosher commanded honesty...

Being a mentch is the first step towards being a good Jew...

But dear friends, it doesn't end there...

Judaism isn't just about being a nice, decent human being

That's basic humanity... its universal!

We were chosen for the task of being a light onto the nations

To be the carriers of the torch

G-d's witnesses to the world

We were given Shabbos – a real life weekly reminder that there's a Creator who's in charge, who runs this place...

Mezuzah at the entrance of each room in our homes – a reminder that He’s always watching over us and protecting us

Tefillin brings inner peace between mind and heart

Kosher diet – makes us sensitive to Hashem and spirituality

Some people can’t eat peanuts, it’s dangerous for them

For others it might be perfectly fine, for them it’s poison

For us – it’s gotta be kosher...

People think kosher is for health...

Really?

Tell me which of these items is healthy:

Cholent... kishka.. latkes, blintzes, kasha varnishkes, & gefilte fish...

Kosher can also be healthy (my Sara would have it no other way...). Conversely, one can be non-kosher and eat unhealthily. Health is a mitzvah in its own right, but has nothing to do with kosher. Kosher is spiritual health – G-d is your nutritionist... making you more sensitive to your soul, to G-d, to others and to spirituality.

So let’s make sure not to reduce Judaism to social action. Social action is universal. We’ve got lots of “Jewish things”

BTW – the non-Jews love it when we do our Jewish things...

Senator Lieberman writes in his book - during his VP campaign with Al Gore, people complained about his not campaigning on Shabbos – President Clinton said, and I quote:

Tell ‘em to go straight to hell...

When PM Bibi Netanyahu went to China in May for important high level meetings on how to increase bilateral trade between the two countries, and Bibi’s son **Avner** decided it was time to put on Tefillin... the press couldn’t get enough of it. The entire Chinese and international press

corps covering the meetings were awed by it, even while junior Netanyahu was standing in his corner, taking his three steps back and forth for the silent prayer, minding his own business...

This winter Port Washington witnessed its own miracle child with the recovery of **Sidney Livingston**. Prayers came from every house of worship in the community. Here at Chabad we prayed for Sidney as well. I'm proud of the fact Diane & Scott insisted I visit with Sidney and pray with the family, first at the hospital, then later at their home. They introduced me to their friends as their spiritual leader... I asked them about this, Diane said: "We're committed to our own religion, but everyone knows Judaism is the mother of all faiths. And you're really serious about your faith, so you're my spiritual leader..."

So non-Jews are happy when we do our Jewish thing...

They expect more from us than bagels and lox and environmental awareness.

They expect more from us than just being friendly...

They expect Kiddush and Shabbos and Shul and tallis...

Which brings me to the subject of our children, the next generation.

I believe we are losing their interest because we are watering down Judaism to social action alone. We absolutely need social action. Tzedakah and helping others is an important part of Judaism. But when this becomes the whole story, our kids don't see anything uniquely Jewish about that. Everyone can and should do kindness. It rings hollow to them. They're looking for the depth of meaning in yiddishkeit of their parents and grandparents.

I was in the express lane at the store quietly fuming. Completely ignoring the sign, the woman ahead of me had slipped into the check-out line pushing a cart piled high with groceries. Imagine my delight when the cashier beckoned the woman to come forward looked into the cart and asked sweetly, "So which six items would you like me to ring up?"

Moral: If we want our children to "check out" with carts filled with Judaism, we can't give them the "express lane"...

An important example of where we are focusing in one area at the expense of another equally important area:

We Jews love to memorialize.

And rightfully so.

Our fallen heroes in Israel deserve to be remembered and honored in perpetuity

The 6-7 million Jews, including over a million children, lost in the holocaust must be remembered forever

It's important, no question about that!

At times though it seems to me we focus solely on remembering our past - that we fail to worry about securing our future, which is at least equally important, don't you think?

We shout at the top of our voices – Never Again... while shying away from standing up tall against today's heirs of Hitler and Stalin – in the form of radical Islam – whose ideas are sweeping Europe and are becoming more tolerated in cities across the United States with each passing day...

I have no respect for so called Holocaust Memorial Museums which speak less about the Holocaust and more about genocide in Darfus and bullying in the schools. At a time when the State of Israel (and therefore all Jews everywhere) faces an existential threat. It's kind of ridiculous...

And then there's the threat to our people through assimilation.

It's a real threat to our people's survival, to its future.

If the stats are correct - 50% of Jews today will not have Jewish grandchildren. They'll be lost to the Jewish people.

If we mean what we say in NEVER AGAIN ... what are we doing about ensuring that our people don't disappear slowly but surely through the friendly fire of assimilation, apathy, ignorance, indifference?

Story of fire burning during commemoration ceremony

A family had a tradition to gather each year to commemorate the tragic fire of 1962 which burned down their historic estate which was in the family for over a century. Four, five generations of descendants would travel from near and far to gather at the now rebuilt estate to commemorate the fire. It happened once that during one of those memorial gatherings a fire broke out on the new estate. Someone noticed the fire and alerted the assembled. He was quieted... time and again. When he persisted, the event chairman shouted him down: Don't you realize we're in the midst of commemorating the important event of the fire of 1962... nothing at all can be important enough to disturb these proceedings.

"But there's a fire... it's going to burn down the estate... yet again!"

Jewish day school education – "but rabbi, is it really that important for my kids?"

Dr Ruben told me when I asked him if I really had to floss all of my teeth every day: Rabbi, you only have to floss those that you want to keep

I say: Day School education is only important for the kids you want to make sure they remain Jewish and have Jewish grandchildren.

Child doesn't go to a Jewish day school – stats are 50% he won't have Jewish grandchildren

Imagine I knew my family has 50% chance of a serious condition

Wouldn't I take the treatment, even if it's expensive, and difficult to come by, not completely approved by the FDA, even if I have to move my family to where my kids won't have their friends who live nearby –

WHO CARES! We're talking 50%! We'll do whatever it takes...

A woman was working in the kitchen when she heard her 6-year old son call for her.

"Mummy, Mummy!" he called. "Do you know that beautiful vase in the dining room that's been handed down from generation to generation?"

"Yes", she said. "What about it?"

"Well, the last generation just dropped it."

We wonder why the next generation is not turned on to Judaism

In rings hollow to them...

All of those hundreds of volumes of Jewish scholarship got to be telling us more than just to be polite to strangers at the supermarket

All of the totally disproportionate media attention – for good and for bad – that we get must mean that there's something really important about us Jews

Let's tell them the truth – and watch how quick their ears perk up –

Tell 'em we've been equipped with a system for life designed by the Creator Himself to infuse meaning and purpose into every day and every single thing we do

From the way we eat... to the way we work ...to our marriages

Tell 'em we've been charged with the mission of bringing heaven to earth

Of introducing the world to Al-Mighty G-d and nurturing that relationship

Of being a light onto the nations

Of explaining to all of humanity that each human being is special, unique, created in the image of G-d

That each one matters

Not one is dispensable, not one is extra

Each one is needed to complete the mission of making the world a holy place

Give it to them through a real Jewish summer camp experience

A meaningful trip to Israel

Shabbat dinners with challah and Kiddush

Have them prepare and deliver thoughts on Judaism

MUSHKA DRIVING LESSONS –

“Where you look, that's the direction you're gonna go”

Moral: Need not do everything, but we must show the kids that's the direction we're headed
They see us making small increases in our yiddishkeit
Let them catch you us with tefillin or studying torah

Camel in Bronx Zoo

Baby camel asks mommy camel:

Why have I got these huge three-toed feet?"

"Well, son, when we trek across the desert, your toes will help you to stay on top of the soft sand."

"Mom, why have I got these long eyelashes?"

"They are there to keep the sand out of your eyes on the trips through the desert."

"Mom, why have I got these great big humps on my back?"

"They are there to help us store energy for our long treks across the desert, so we can travel for long periods."

"So, we have huge feet to stop us from sinking, long eyelashes to keep the sand out of our eyes and these humps to store energy for trekking across the desert."

"Yes, dear."

"SO WHAT ARE WE DOING IN THE BRONX ZOO?"

We are equipped with such powerful gifts –

3000 years of a rich heritage

Torah – G-d's personal diary, with its timeless wisdom and depth which is still being unearthed with every passing day

Talmudic analysis

Kabbalistic teachings

We're the people of the Book

And we're telling our children – just be nice?

Like the camel –

We're equipped with all the "water" that it takes to turn a spiritually parched world into an oasis of G-dliness and goodness,

We've been empowered to nourish a society in thirst of meaning and purpose and a sense of direction

Let's get out there and do our job

Our non-Jewish neighbors expect more from us

Our children expect more from us

Torah and Mitzvahs are compared to water in Jewish literature

Let's give our children plenty of it...

It'll help put out the fire

While quenching their thirst for lives of meaning and purpose.

Shana Tova