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

**Rosh Hashanah Day 1, 5773**

**Miracle of Jewish Survival**

Story of couple- wife was health freak. Only organics, no carbs, no alcohol, lots of exercise, they lived late into their 90s. Eventually they die and come to heaven.

When they reach Heaven, a guide takes them to a beautiful house, furnished in gold and fine silks. All their favorite clothes are hanging in the bedroom's wardrobes and the kitchen is fully stocked. There is even a waterfall in the house's extensive grounds. They're thrilled when the guide says, "Welcome to your new home."

In their previous life, they were not very well off and survived by watching their pennies, so the husband asks, "How much is this going to cost?" "Nothing," replies the guide, "this is your reward in Heaven." He looks out the window. To the left of the waterfall is a golf course, more beautiful than any he'd seen on Earth. "What are the green fees?" he asks. "This is heaven," replies the guide, "you can play for free, every day." The guide then takes them into to the clubhouse. "Wow!" the husband says, when he sees the lavish buffet lunch laid out before them. There is every kind of food, from seafood to steaks to exotic desserts, and plenty of alcohol. "Don't even ask," says the guide, "this is Heaven, it's all free for you to enjoy." He looks around, glances nervously at his wife and asks, "Where are the low fat and low cholesterol foods, and the decaffeinated coffee?" "That's the best part," replies the guide, "you can eat and drink as much as you like of whatever you like, and you'll never get fat or sick. This is Heaven!" "No testing of my sugar, cholesterol or blood pressure?" "Never again. All you do here is enjoy yourself," replies the guide.

On hearing all this, the husband glares at his wife and says, "If it wasn't for your stupid bran cereals, your yucky unsweetened green teas, your low fat this and low fat that - we could have been here ten years ago!"

We should all be written and inscribed in the book of life!

I wish everyone and their families health, wealth, nachas, joy, happiness and contentment.

Blessing for Jews in Israel for peace and tranquility...

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Earlier this year, the Prime Minister of Israel granted the American President, Barack Obama, a special gift: the biblical book of Esther. He wanted President Obama to put this book on his night table and read it perhaps before retiring to bed, so he could understand something about the history of Jewish people.

It's a familiar-sounding story: In Persia, an oppressive and vengeful leader seeks the total annihilation of the Jewish people. It sounds like a line from an Israeli speech, but it's also the story of Purim

Bibi has spoken of some of the evils perpetrated by the Iranian regime murdering thousands upon thousands and continued: "This is how Iran behaves today, without nuclear weapons. Think of how they will behave tomorrow, with nuclear weapons. Iran will be even more reckless and far more dangerous.

"There's been plenty of talk recently about the costs of stopping Iran. I think it's time to talk about the costs of not stopping Iran.

"The world's most volatile region would become a nuclear tinderbox waiting to go off. And the worst nightmare of all, Iran could threaten all of us with nuclear terrorism."

I was proud of him when he said: "As Prime Minister of Israel, I will never let my people live under the shadow of annihilation."

Then he added a frightening piece of history:

"They say that a military confrontation with Iran would undermine the efforts already underway, that it would be ineffective, and that it would provoke even more vindictive action by Iran.

"I've heard these arguments before. In fact, I've read them before. In my desk, I have copies of an exchange of letters between the World Jewish Congress and the US War Department. The year was 1944. The World Jewish Congress implored the American government to bomb Auschwitz. The reply came five days later.

"Such an effort might provoke even more vindictive action by the Germans." Think about that – "even more vindictive action" — than the Holocaust.

Jews don't like making trouble – no matter what:

“Do we tip the wipers?”

One Jew to another as they face the firing squad: “Don’t make trouble!”

And then he spoke of Purim:

“One woman changed Jewish history. In every generation, there are those who wish to destroy the Jewish people.”

That is why the Prime Minister of Israel gave Obama the book of Esther: he wanted the President to learn that close to 2500 years ago somebody in Iran plotted almost successfully to exterminate every single Jew existing. He wanted the US leader to understand what the Jewish people are confronting and why Israel can never tolerate a nuclear Iran. A country that calls and works for Israel’s destruction relentlessly.

Netanyahu reportedly explicitly told Obama that Israel faced a modern-day Haman.

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I loved Netanyahu’s words. We all bless and pray that G-d guide the Prime Minister in his critical efforts to stop Iran now—for the sake of the Jewish people and for the sake of the world.

But there was one thing about Esther which he did not say, and which we must add today.

How did Esther save her people? Let's recall the story.

For one thing, she brilliantly and skillfully persuaded her husband, the King of Persia, to get rid of Haman and to foil the plot of the Ahmadinejad of the time.

But there is one more component to the story which is easy to overlook.

Esther responded: “Go gather all the Jews who are in Shushan, and fast for my sake—do not eat or drink for three days, night and day; I and my maidens will likewise fast.”

As Esther said, it was forbidden, on pain of death, for anyone to go to the king un-summoned. Esther’s only chance was to charm the king. The last thing for her to do under such circumstances was to approach the king looking like a woman who had not eaten for three days!

Esther’s primary appeal was her exquisite beauty. Esther should have, instead of fasting for three days, spent the three days in a beauty parlor, beautifying herself and making herself as attractive as possible to the Persian king. Why did Esther decide to engage in a three-day fast?

To put it differently:

There seems to be a confusing message here. Who do we believe in? G-d or Achashveirosh?

In modern context – G-d or Washington?

If we believe that G-d runs the world and He is the only boss, then Esther! Forget Achashverosh! Mordechai should just go to shul and fast and pray.

If Achashvorosh runs the world, don't fast for three days and look emaciated; spend three days whining, dinning, "putzing," do Yoga, massage therapy, aroma therapy, get a new gown, some pedicures and manicures, get the nails done, the hair done, and blow Achasvorsh away. Let the Rabbis do the fasting. (they can anyway lose the weight...)

The answer to this we will understand via an anecdote:

Anecdote:

A little boy wanted \$100 so badly that he prayed for two weeks, but nothing happened. He decided to write a letter to the Lord requesting the \$100. When the postal authorities received the letter addressed to "Lord, USA," they decided to send it to the President at the time, George Bush.

The President was so impressed, touched and amused that he instructed his secretary to send the little boy a \$5 bill. Mr. Bush thought this would appear to be a lot of money to a little boy.

The little boy was delighted with the \$5 and sat down to write a thank-you note to the Lord, which read:

"Dear Lord,

"Thank you very much for sending me the money. It's just a pity you had to send it through Washington, D.C. and, as usual, those morons deducted \$95."

This is the essence of Judaism—articulated by a simple child. The money comes from G-d, and G-d alone. Sometimes G-d chooses to send the money THROUGH Washington.

Our existence is miraculous, and only thanks to G-d. But yes, we're supposed to use the normal channels of government.

But that's not the real key.

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The same is on a personal level as well:

When we have a need for a blessing for success or health – we pray, and then we also go ahead and get the best doctors, or find the most opportune business venture. Which one is it that's bringing us the blessing – G-d or the doctor? G-d or the business deal? If it's G-d – why bother with the other stuff? If it's not G-d – why bother praying? Is it both? Then what percentage... 50/50? 20/80? 99/1?....

What's the Jewish view on this?

Judaism believes all blessing comes from G-d. Yet, G-d works through the channels of nature. As such, we are expected to make a proper vessel to serve as the channel. But the blessing is 100% from G-d.

The Rebbe, Rabbi Schneerson of blessed memory, explained it this way:

Imagine, someone walks into a bank and asks how does one take out money? He says: I need \$150,000 for a down payment on my new home. You tell him: You need to fill out a withdrawal slip and stand on line. So the man goes, fills out the withdrawal slip, asking for 150k, laminates the form, and decorates it in the most beautiful way, then he goes and presents it to the bank manager asking for the 150k. The manager cries: But you only have \$2,000 in your bank account, how can I give you 150k?!

So the man hollers: I was told that it is through the withdrawal slip you obtain the money!

And the manager explains to him, that the main thing is to have the money in the account, then in order to access it, you fill out a withdrawal slip. But that is not the main source of the money!

Yes, we need to make a channel – but the blessing comes from Heaven!

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So back to Esther:

Esther recognized that the existence of the Jewish people from the day they became a people has never been a natural phenomenon.

So Esther understood that not Haman and not Achasverosh will be the real authorities to decide the fate of Israel. G-d is. The key to saving her people was to reestablish the relationship between G-d and Israel on its original, supra-natural terms. The Jews must return to G-d; they must draw on their only true resource—G-d's love for them and His commitment to their survival.

We're supposed to use natural means as a "channel" to G-d's protection

That's why Esther goes to the king and does whatever possible to change his mind

But she will not appeal less fervently to G-d because she fears it will make her less attractive to Achashverosh—that would be like a soldier discarding his rifle because it creases his uniform.

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Same holds true nowadays and always:

Jewish survival was never a natural thing. It's quite obviously in G-d's hands:

According to all statistics we shouldn't be here today

The one thing all nations agreed upon was their hatred to the Jew

Endangered species require special protection, movements, laws enacted, otherwise they won't survive.

Not that anyone is bent on wiping them out, it's just natural, when hunters are allowed to hunt freely, species could disappear; they're against the odds.

Imagine if all the world's hunters made a campaign to wipe a certain species off the face of the earth – it would be gone in two weeks!

That's what happened to our people: from the beginning of our history we were being hunted down for annihilation. The one thing everyone seemed to be able to agree on was wiping out the Jew! (Heck – we could have brought world peace, we're the one thing everyone agreed on!)

This tiny people, no land of its own, thrown around and downtrodden everywhere

Focused effort on behalf of dictator and dictator, superpower after superpower

Everyone from monarchs to governors to the local baron -

The one thing they agreed upon is the Jew is bad and needs to be hated and eliminated

If we're rich – we're stealing

If we're poor – we're ridiculed

If we take sides in a conflict – we must be looking to gain at expense of non-Jewish blood being spilled

If we stay out of the conflict - we're accused of being traitors

If we're in a foreign land – we're told we don't belong there and to go home

We finally have our own land – we're told we're occupiers and got to get out

We simply can't win!

It's been universally agreed – we're no good and got to be done away with

And somehow it just doesn't happen... it can't be done!

This tiny people... in terms of its numbers – a speck of dust, a tiny nuisance... little thing that won't go away...

It makes no sense - It's a miracle

Mark Twain:

The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

The person who summed this up best was David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of the State of Israel (who was far from a religious person). He said: "A Jew who does not believe in miracles is not a realist."

Why did he say that? Because miracles are the only possible explanation for the existence of the Jewish people.

Over 300 years ago King Louis XIV of France asked Blaise Pascal (blaze pascal – emphasis on cal, French sounding), the great French philosopher, to give him proof of the supernatural. Pascal answered: "Why, the Jews, your Majesty — the Jews."

An astonishing answer. The best proof of the supernatural that Pascal could think of was: "The Jews."

The prophet said: Ani Hashem Lo Shonisi v'atem bnai Yaakov lo chilisem – we're an infinite people just like G-d Himself is infinite

Atem Eiday... the miracle of Jewish survival is testimony to G-d's existence. There's no other way to explain it

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Israel today needs to appeal to Washington and try to work the UN

We need to use all our contacts to bring pressure to bear on world powers apathetic to danger of situation

Netanyahu must pressure Obama

Jews with any form of influence must alarm the world to the dangers of Iran's lunacy

We must put up a singular fight against the apathy of world leaders and governments about Iran.

But our survival is not up to any of them

Our survival is miraculous. We're here only because G-d said so.

We guarantee that special Divine treatment by holding fast to our traditions.

The traditions of our people are G-d given. When we hold on to these traditions we're blessed with that special G-dly blessing of immortality that no one can explain.

They just admitted into Guinness Book of World Record family 7 brothers, oldest 101 years, others not much younger, total together 700 years...

Am yisroel should definitely be in Guinness! A nation over 3000 years old, same torah, same mitzvos... We're a world record if there ever was one!!!

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## **The Titanic**

As the centennial anniversary of the Titanic disaster is this year, the world is again gripped by memory of this epic disaster. The movie TITANIC that exposed a generation to the tale back in 1997 was back in theatres this year, this time in 3D. A new museum opened in April in Southampton, in the U.K.

Almost 1000 feet long

Captain Smith was planning to retire after the maiden voyage of Titanic. The Titanic cost \$7,500,000 to make in the early 1900s which is equivalent to \$400,000,000 today.



First-class started at \$125 up to deluxe suite was priced at \$4,500.

Ordinary house at the time: \$2,000 dollars...

The Titanic steamed from Southampton, England on April 10, 1912, one day after Passover—toward New York, carrying 2,228 passengers and crew.

There were 705 survivors. The other 1523 people perished in the frigid waters of the Atlantic.

### **A Mother and Son**

Among the passengers, was also 18-year-old Jewish immigrant Leah Aks and her 10-month-old son, Ephraim Fishel.

Family lived in UK, Leah was recently married. She and her husband Sam decided to move to the US the goldeneh medinah.

By this time Leah was expecting their first child and her parents felt strongly that in her condition she should not make such an arduous trip across the ocean. It was decided that Sam would travel alone, set up a home in Norfolk, Virginia and a few months after the child was born, Leah would come with the infant.

Twenty minutes after hitting the iceberg, after consulting with the ship's designer, Thomas Andrews, Captain Edward Smith realized that the ship would sink within two hours. Everyone on board would lose their lives unless they could get on lifeboats and be rescued by passing ships.

It is now that the tragedy became clear: There were not enough spaces in the lifeboats for everyone.

Though there were 2200 passengers and crew

There was room for only about 1200 on the lifeboats

More than a thousand people would surely die

As the boat began tilting there was panic and pandemonium. The captain and crew ordered that women and children would be saved first.

In the third class cabin, women were ordered to the front and men to the rear.

Leah Aks held her son Ephraim Fishel (Philly), in her arms and tried to get out onto the deck, but the gate in front of the cabin jammed and no one could get out. She stood pressed against the gate, screaming for help. A sailor saw her with her baby in her arms and he reached over the gate and lifted her and the child out, so that she could run to the deck where women and children were being put into lifeboats.

Leah ran up to the deck with her child and waited by the railing, trying to get on line to be rescued. It was frighteningly cold. People were shoving and pushing frantically trying to get onto lifeboats.

As Leah stood on the deck, one of the wealthiest women on board, Lady Madeleine Astor, saw her and the baby huddled against the cold. Lady Astor, who was five months pregnant, removed her beautiful eight-foot shawl and gave it to Leah saying, "Here, wrap your baby, it's so cold out here." Her teeth chattering, Leah thanked her profusely.

During this time, a man had pushed onto a lifeboat that was about to be lowered into the water. When cabin stewards saw him, they forced him out of the boat and pulled him back on deck, yelling that women and children were being rescued first. Somehow this man managed to get onto another lifeboat and once again the stewards saw him and forced him off the lifeboat, fighting with him, as they insisted that women and children were being given priority. The man saw Leah standing there with her baby now wrapped in the shawl. He was enraged. His eyes were wild as he stalked back and forth consumed by anger and frustration. In a demented moment of madness he ran towards Leah and screamed, "You think women are first! You think children are first! I'll show you," and he grabbed the infant from Leah's arms and threw him overboard.

Leah shrieked in horror and cried out for her child. Men on board lunged at this maniac but the deed had been done. The poor baby was gone. People were yelling and screaming — but now it was Leah's turn to get on a lifeboat. "I won't go without my baby," she cried. But the officers told her she had to save her own life. There was no point in staying on the sinking ship. The women around her tried to console her, but Leah cried hysterically as she was placed on the lifeboat and lowered into the water.

She sat in the middle of the Atlantic with 63 others in number 13, a broken woman.

At 2:20 AM, the Titanic went down, and with every passing minute the cries for help from those dying in the water faded away.

Only at daybreak, April 15, did the liner Carpathia arrive and rescued the survivors from the lifeboats.

### **On the Carpathia**

Leah was shattered. She took to a mattress for two days. Titanic survivors urged Leah to come up on deck for air. When she did, the grief-stricken Leah suddenly saw a woman holding a child. Leah heard the child crying, and the voice sounded too familiar. As Leah came closer, the child saw Leah and lunged towards her. She recognized him. It was non-other than her lost child Ephraim Fishel. Leah screamed, "That's my baby! That's my child!"

When the madman through the baby overboard—he fell into the hands of a woman sitting on lifeboat #11.

The Catholic woman, Mrs. Elizabeth Ramell Nye, was pregnant. Her husband too was not permitted to follow his pregnant wife into the lifeboat. He perished.

As a firm Christian believer, when the child fell right into her hands, she began to believe that G-d had sent this child to her as a replacement for her dead husband and a brother for the child she carried in her womb.

“No it’s not your child,” she insisted. “This child was entrusted to me!”

Leah appealed to the Carpathia’s captain, Arthur Roston, now put in the role of King Solomon deciding who the real mother is. Leah was crying hysterically while Mrs. Nye was insisting her position. She would not be denied this child. Captain Rostron told both women to come with the child to his quarters where he could reflect and decide the matter.

In the captain’s quarters, Leah suddenly called out, “I can prove this is my child.” The 18-year-old Leah spoke firmly and with certainty, “I am Jewish and my son was circumcised!” The baby was exposed—and there it was, black-and-white: the baby had a bris. When Captain Rostron saw that, ten-month-old Ephraim Fishel was returned to his mother.

### **The Key to Survival**

This story is not only a story about Ephraim Fishel Aks; it is also a commentary on our own long narrative...

Like the TITANIC – hailed as THE UNSINKABLE OCEAN LINER

Like the arrogance of its captain who went full speed ahead undeterred and too sure of himself and his skills and personal prowess...

As Mark Twain said – when he spoke of so many nations, superpowers who were so sure of themselves and their own prowess, they’ve all come and gone

And yet – this tiny miraculous people

Who were never overly sure of themselves

Born from a miraculous child named Isaac

A nation of downtrodden slaves, whose birth into a free people required nothing less than the splitting of the sea...

A tiny people so often thrown overboard – discarded like that tiny baby Aks, a tiny helpless people that should be so easy to do away with...

Each time the enemy is convinced: This is it – we’ve done it, we’ve finally come up with the final solution...

And they’re still here...

Somehow miraculously we survive

“What’s the secret to his immortality” asks Twain...

It’s the bris, the covenant, our connection to G-d our beloved Father in Heaven who chose us as His beloved chosen people – chosen to be His witnesses to the world of its Great Creator!

Dear friends, you want to see a miracle?

When you get home today – take a good look in the mirror!

You think you’re just another natural thing? You’re not a realist...

When the monarch asks a world famous philosopher for proof of the supernatural – he doesn’t point to sun and the moon, or to the seven wonders of the world...

He simply says: “Why, the Jews, your majesty. The Jews!”

That means our bubbies and zeidies for 150 generations

And it also means us – YOU, and you and you... (I can repeat that 600 times –or 15 million times...)

When you put on your talis and tefillin and cover your eyes to say the SHMA –

Your zeidies and bubbies are right there – kissing your tzitzis!

When you light your Shabbat candles, recite the blessing, cover your eyes and utter a silent prayer for your family’s wellbeing –

Your bubbies and zeidies are right there – answering AMEN, wiping away the tears...

And when you LIVE THE MIRACLE – when you LIVE YIDDISHKEIT – happily and joyously embracing our timeless traditions

And when you do whatever is in your power to ensure that your children and their children will LIVE YIDDISHKEIT...

You’re an angel of G-d – because you’re actually making the miracle happen!