

B"H

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

Yiskor –Yom Kippur 5772-2011

How to Overcome Fear & Instill Self Confidence

I often overhear people walking into this building, look around and comment: What a Chabad... I'm proud of course of what we have accomplished together as a community.

Funny story: During our recent annual dinner in April, as the crowds were being moved from this room where the cocktail hour was held and ushered into the new Adam Katz gym, which was quite dazzling... baskets and basketball centerpieces... dime lights... Globetrotter theme music... My son Mendel overhears a woman speaking telling her husband (we have a very ecumenical crowd at the dinner... she was probably Italian or Irish, certainly not Jewish): Wow, honey... What a Cabob... What a Cabob...

(I'm sorry to be discussing Cabob's at a time like this...)

Thank all for being here and for being part of this great "Cabob" ... And to those who are here for the first time.... welcome to our Cabob...

An Israeli cop is patrolling the highways, when he pulls over a young driver speeding way beyond the speed limit. The cop proudly walks up to the driver's window: "I've been waiting for you all day!" To which the kid replies: "I tried to get here as fast as I could..." When the cop finally finished laughing, he sent him off without a fine.

Talk about excuses for sin...

About ten years ago a rich Israeli businessman was on the top of the world. He was a multi-millionaire, toured the globe enjoying the best hotels, restaurants, cars and anything that money could buy. He was a self-made-man who loved his creator (i.e. himself). He was arrogant, cold, tough, and boastful. But a number of years ago, like many others, he made some big investment mistakes, and began to lose his fortune. In just months every penny he had saved and slaved for was gone and he was a pauper. And after he liquidated all his assets and even sold his house to pay his debts he still owed 17,000 shekels to the Israeli Revenue Service.

He asked an old friend for a loan. He went up to his friend's office at the 49th floor of the Azrieli center in Tel Aviv. His friend gave him 17,000 shekel and the man left the office.

With nothing better to do he decided to walk around and have a look. After a few minutes of strolling he noticed a set of stairs leading up to a large metal door, which he ascended and opened the door. A cold autumn wind blew into his face. It was the door leading to the roof, 'why not', he thought to himself as he went out.

Ah it was beautiful! From here he could see far into the distance; the Judean hills in one direction, the wide, vast Mediterranean sea on the other. He just stood there, thinking and trying to enjoy the weather when suddenly a loud thud behind him broke his thoughts; a quick glance revealed that the wind slammed the door shut. He decided it was time to go back.

He went to the door and tried to open it but it seemed to be locked. He tried peering from all sorts of angles to figure out the latch but he couldn't. So he began to pound on the door and when that didn't work, to kick at it. For sure someone would hear.

But no one did. The wind was getting stronger and colder now and he wasn't really dressed for this. He looked around for some object to hit the door with, to attract attention and get out but there was none. He still had a good hour before dark; people were probably still in their offices so he pounded, kicked and yelled but there was no response.

When he took out his black berry he discovered that the battery was dead. Totally dead! Of all times for this to happen!

But he didn't lose his composure. He had to work fast. He went to the edge of the building, peered over the small protective fence and began waving his arms and yelling to the people far below. After just five minutes, he realized was totally futile. There was no way that anyone would notice him from 49 floors below. But he had to remain calm. It was his only chance. Soon it would be dark and really cold. And there was nowhere to get protection from the wind, which was getting colder by the minute.

Suddenly he had an idea. The money! He had 17,000 shekels in his pocket. For sure if he threw a 200 shekel note down people would look up to see where it was coming from... and see him.

He pulled out a stack of bills, removed one, looked over the fence and threw it. He watched as it floated crazily in the wind and finally, after several minutes, landed on the other side of the street; someone stopped, bent down, picked it up and continued walking.

This time he took out five bills, 1,000 altogether and let them drop... but it was the same thing. No one noticed them until they hit the ground, then they picked them up, looked around for more and kept going.

He knew what he had to do! It was his only chance! He took all the money from his pocket, tore the band that held it neatly in a pack and with a yell, threw it below as hard as he could. With his last optimism he gazed as it scattered far below him. He removed his shirt and began waving it frantically for someone to notice. But he couldn't believe his eyes; not only did no one look up or hear his cries for help; they were all arguing down there about who saw which bill first!

He looked around on the roof, the sun was setting, it was still light enough to see, but he saw nothing..... only the sky.

His eyes filled with tears, suddenly he felt small, he needed help; he was sure that G-d would help him. The sky said so. A second ago he didn't even believe there was such a thing but now it was obvious... he wasn't alone. He yelled out, "HaShem! HaShem! (G-d)... help! Help me!"

Suddenly his eye caught a medium sized sack of small pebbles. Why didn't he see it before? But there it was! He dragged it to the fence, took a handful, said a prayer, threw it over the side and began waving his arms and looking down again.

Sure enough, this time it worked! People began cursing; looking up pointing and screaming at him. Probably all of them called the police because in just moments the door burst open, police with guns drawn stormed onto the roof, put handcuffs on him and took him to the station. He was saved!

It took some serious explaining. He was lucky that no one was really hurt from his pebbles and, of course, he lost the 17,000 shekel and still owed the taxes. But after a few days they accepted his story and let him out.

At that moment he discovered a deep lesson: the people on the street were just like him. All the time money was raining down the people never looked up... they looked only down, for more money. But as soon as they started feeling the pebbles hurting them they looked up to see where they were coming from.

How true of life. When we have everything we need, when the "shekels" are coming down on us, we sometimes take it for granted and we never look up. Only when we feel the "pebbles" falling on us, does it make us look up... see that there is a higher source, to which we are responsible.

If we look upwards even in the good times and know where our blessings come from... then, when the tough times come and some pebbles fall, we know we're not alone.. We have a sense of belonging and security.

Security, feeling secure and protected, is arguably the greatest human need.

Insecurity and fear can paralyze us...

And they're quite rampant.

Insecurity has many names and many faces: Fear. Distrust. Uncertainty. Skepticism. Cynicism. Indecisiveness. Avoidance.

Lack of self confidence.

We're all plagued at some point or other with self doubt. We're afraid we are unable to stand up the task at hand... we can't make it in life... we feel we're not good enough or don't have what it takes to navigate properly though life.

And this is true today more than in the past... Insecurity is arguably today's norm.

On top of that: 9/11 ushered in a new age of uncertainty and unpredictability.

People today are worried & impatient... The new serenity prayer is: G-d give me patience and give it to me NOW!

They did a study: What percentage of the world do you think suffer from low self esteem? Come up with a number in your head... Ready? – 85% of people worldwide suffer from low self esteem.... (Wow!)

Now, it makes sense that people feel insecure and uncertain about things. Uncertainty is completely natural in our uncertain world. We live in a world where nothing is permanent. Everything is unpredictable. How are we supposed to feel secure and self confident?

We make plans, everything is lined up perfectly, then suddenly something changes and all our plans are nothing.

We all age, everything erodes, everyone dies – how can we ever find certainty in such an unstable environment? The world is not secure... it is in a constant state of flux. There is nothing predictable and no constant to bank on. How are we supposed to feel secure?!

Our current times bring this home in a big way:

Iconic financial institutions which served as symbols of stability and constancy, institutions we always believed would be here forever, crumbled before our very eyes like sand castles...

Terrorism is constantly on our minds and can in fact hit at anytime, anywhere.

Earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, even tornadoes popping up more frequently and in places we never thought possible...

Devastation from: natural disasters, financial ruin, illness - hit so many people every year.

Even if we're the lucky ones to be walking between the rain drops, we hardly feel secure....

People all around us are getting hit: One neighbor was diagnosed with cancer, another just lost his job... across the street, their kid just OD'd... If we're the lucky ones to be walking between the raindrops, we just act dumb... (men macht zich nist visendik...) we keep on walking, don't look back, keep our fingers crossed and hope for the best...

That's not security...

How do we deal with this? How do we come to a place of security and self confidence?

Only one way: We need to build a relationship with the Big Daddy – our Father in Heaven!

He's the only sure thing, the only constant, the only thing that's not here today gone tomorrow.

Everything else in life is uncertain and on shaky ground, by definition.

I submit to you today, dear friends, the only sure way to self confidence is a relationship with G-d.

Six of the Twelve Steps– that's half of the Twelve Steps – are about connection to G-d. Connection to G-d is considered the life-line out of the pit of self-doubt and insecurity that underlies all addictions.

But you're thinking:

"So rabbi, you want me to have a relationship with G-d. I got two problems with that statement: I don't know what G-d is and I don't know what a relationship is..."

I mean, let's get real! We should have a relationship with G-d?! We've got a hard enough time with human relationships – especially this side of the room (the men...).

Two kids are playing in Kindergarten. The little girl says to the little boy: "let's play house." He says: "So what do you want me to do?" She says: "Why don't you go ahead and communicate your feelings." To which he replies: "Communicate my feelings?! I have no idea what that means!" "Great – then you can be the husband!"

So what is this talk about building a relationship with G-d!?

Some years back while we were working on our annual dinner, we had an amazingly dedicated volunteer named Lida Esrail (who is here today). She worked day and night, above and beyond the call of duty, calling everyone and anyone, making sure they attended the event and supported the cause. I mean, she called everyone in the phone book. She even accidentally called my home one evening...

So, it's about a week before the dinner, and I'm making my own phone calls for some of the larger gifts for the dinner. I place a call to Lida's husband, Joseph, and I ask him for his annual gift. To which he replies: "Rabbi, you have to call me?! One of your salespeople lives in my house!!!"

When we decide to get to know G-d we need not look far at all. We can look inside ourselves. A piece of G-d resides within us!

Want to get to know G-d? Look inside of you! Your soul is part of G-d! How else do we work... what else makes us tick?

When I first came to town 20 years ago I used to hold weekly study sessions for doctors at S Francis Hospital. One time we were discussing G-d and whether He is directly involved in our lives or not. I wanted to make a point, so I asked the doctors: What moves the body, what animates it?

The doctors: Well, it's the blood which circulates throughout the body.

I nodded that I understood.

Me: And what moves the blood to circulate throughout the body.

The docs: Well, of course it's the heart. Everyone knows the heart pumps the blood to circulate.

Again, I nodded that I understood perfectly.

Me: And what moves the heart?

Docs: (a bit taken aback) Rabbi, that's just how it works...

I just stare at them... I give them my best "I'm totally confused now" look... a look that said: What in the world does that mean... Until now I was following, now you lost me... Until one of the doctors had the courage and pointed upwards; and then the rest of them did the same.

I've been at bedside at the moment of death on numerous occasions. I'm always deeply impacted by this. It makes a deep impression upon me. I realize the simple reality, something so many of us never ponder:

The complete insignificance of the body – suddenly, in an instant, it's nothing... there's no one there... within moments it's cold and completely lifeless, essentially inanimate.

And how awesome the soul is – for 80, 90, 120 years this inanimate body was alive: walked, talked, smiled, laughed, loved, created, explored, invented...

WOW!!! How? Without having to plug in even once... for all these years?!

What moved it?

It's the soul – which G-d blew into us... the breath of life! And we come alive...as we carry within us an energy from Him that is Truly Alive...

Then when the time comes He breaths back in...and we go back to our Source. So G-d is inside of us!

That's what it means we are created in image of G-d (one of the meanings).

G-d wanted us to relate to Him... He knew we don't quite know what that means... so He put a piece of HIM into EACH OF US!

Peace of mind, security, self confidence, in a shaky world? Get in touch with G-d, by getting in touch with your SOUL!

The other day I was making my High Holiday appeal telephone calls. I call a fellow who lives here in town; he belongs to another Temple in town and always makes a nice gift this time of year. I ask for a large increase over last year's gift... he says no, it's got to stay the same... I ask for a small increase... he says ok... you know, the regular drill...

Then he begins to tell me how harried he is and how unfocused and stressed he feels all the time. He begs: Rabbi, give me some words of wisdom.

I suggest: You must have a conversation with G-d every day; it's the only way to have some measure of sanity...

Him: I've tried that... but he doesn't say anything.

Me: Oh no? He blew into you... You are breathing, talking and are alive because he is your very soul, your very life... He already said his piece. He doesn't want to dominate the conversation... now it's your turn...

The one and only answer to real security and self confidence is that we have within us an inherent connection to the Eternal, to the Absolute – and that gives us a sense of utter certainty.

This connection to the Eternal, to the Absolute, is the power of the soul... The soul is a burning flame that cannot be extinguished – it is consistent, always sure of itself, always connected to its source... It is

the sense within that we are not alone. And when we really feel that we are not alone because God is with us, all doubts and fears melt away...

I once asked someone: What is more real – your body or your soul? He says: of course the body.

I said: I didn't ask which is more tangible – I asked which is more real. How can you compare?! I can lose my finger, but I can't lose myself... I can suffer from a weak heart, but that won't affect the love I have for my children... In fact, the day comes when my body is rendered completely useless, and my soul lives on.

We should take good care of the body, but we also need to attend to the needs of the soul. Taking care of the body but not the soul – is like taking care of car's body and not its engine...

This guy buys himself a gorgeous car... He's a kid whose salving away to get himself this \$120,000 car... he's living out of a cardboard box but he's got to have his car... It's the brand new, latest model BMW xls abc wxyz... Leather interior AND exterior... It's got a sun roof AND moon roof... on top AND on bottom... I mean, it's got everything! It's a beauty! And he spends hours each day polishing it so it shines and glistens. But he neglects to change oil...He's taking a ride with a friend, and the friend points out – hey, you got some lights blinking with some message... it says something like: Check engine soon... Service engine oil... But he says: Nah, It's nothing... Do you see anything wrong with this car?! It's a beauty! Take a look how it takes off, and it shines... This car needs to be checked? Nonsense! These lights? They're just another feature of the vehicle, giving it color and animation... lights are blinking, stuff's happening...

He's an idiot!

Dear friends, the feelings of insecurity and worry that we feel... those are our red lights blinking... saying CHECK ENGINE SOON... Your SOUL NEEDS SOME OIL, some Torah, some prayer... a good conversation with G-d.

Living a body centered existence is never secure. I can be a great success, but what if tomorrow new technology emerges and my skills are replaced by machines, or by a bunch of 20 year olds in India? I can have a fat portfolio of investments, but what if, G-d forbid, a major shift in the market cuts my portfolio down to 35% of its value... It could happen... It's happened... My portfolio which gave me a false sense of security disappears overnight... I can be a famous singer or professional athlete... and then suddenly I lose my vocal chords or suffer an injury that ruins my career...

If life is about my body I'm NEVER secure.

If life is about my soul - I'm untouchable!

Victor Frankl, the world famous psychiatrist Holocaust Survivor writes in his bestseller Man's Search for Meaning (sold tens of millions of copies in dozens of languages) how he discovered the soul and it's indestructible power – of all places – in the Nazi death camp.

“They were able to strip me of everything... my family, my home, my clothing, my dignity, my freedom... EVERYTHING. But my soul? They couldn't touch it!” He tapped into that reservoir of strength to rebuild his life and regain his sense of self.

I'm sure you all heard of Superman, the world's first superhero... By the way, some believe the cape came from the tallis... (it only works with the good old fashioned large size cape-like tallises... get yourself one of these, it's a different experience...)

(On an aside: The Vulcan Salute is believed to have been taken from the way the Kohens (Jewish priests) hold their fingers during the Priestly Blessings... Leonard Nimoy who played Spock remembered it from his childhood when he peeked out from under his father's tallis to see the Kohens' fingers...)

Christopher Reeve, Mr Superman, after being stripped of all bodily abilities by an accident that rendered him paraplegic, discovered that his life isn't over. He may never be able to use his body again, but he discovered he was not his body. He discovered his soul, his spirit, which gave him the self-confidence to move beyond his disabilities. He, together with his amazing wife Dana, went on to establish the Reeve Foundation and helped millions of people suffering from spinal injuries overcome some of their challenges... and helped millions banish self pity and self doubt and keep on going!

In spite of an unthinkable tragic accident which rendered him completely paralyzed from the neck down... He continued to live and accomplish. One might argue he accomplished during those years as a paraplegic far more than in his role as SUPERMAN! That's when he became a REAL SUPERMAN! He discovered the SUPERMAN within! He discovered that indeed, he was SUPERMAN, untouchable...

Every kid dreams of playing SUPERMAN... Dear friends, I've got good news: You ARE SUPERMAN; SUPERWOMAN. This year let's make it our business to discover the SUPERMAN, the untouchable soul within, the anchor which connects us to the Divine and which is therefore an eternal and infinite reservoir of strength and life...

The take away I'd like to leave you with is this:

In Jewish life we begin each morning with a short prayer known as Modeh Ani in which we thank G-d for breathing a soul into us; we thank Him for returning our soul to us for another day. I suggest to each of you to begin each day with this prayer. (It's at the beginning of any prayer-book. I'll make it my business to include it in the next email I send out). If you don't want to say the exact language of the prayer, say it in your own words.

Here's what to do: As soon as you awake, before you even get out of bed, close your eyes and verbally offer thanks to the Creator, your Father in Heaven, for breathing a part of Himself into you... which is your soul ("neshomo" – soul, is the same root as "neshima" – breath), which makes you a living being.

When I start my day this way, everything is different now... My life has purpose. I'm anchored with the Creator of life... not only is He my Father... He's actually WITHIN ME... So I'm never alone... I'm on solid footing... I have no need to worry... Plus, if G-d saw fit to breathe life into me, then I must matter; I must be important; I must have a purpose to accomplish that is special and unique, something no one else can accomplish... I'm needed...

I jump out of bed with a completely different outlook on life, on myself; I'm not alone, and I have a job to do... So I get up and do it, with energy and zest... This holds true on good days and bad days, in good times and bad times... Even when times are tough, I may be upset, but I don't despair... I'm real, and I'm

connected to someOne real and constant...it doesn't solve all of life's problems, but it sure gives them a different perspective...

I challenge you to try this for 30 days... tell me it didn't make a world of difference in your life.

In closing:

Dvir Imanuelov was the first Israeli soldier to be killed in operation "Cast Lead" a little over two years ago. We can only imagine how devastated Dvir's mother, Dalia, was over the tragic loss of her son at the prime of his life. For the past two years her life was hell on earth. She couldn't bear the pain... She tried everything, went to support groups, spoke to professionals, nothing helped. Her heart was shattered. She felt like her life was over.

Then one night, just a few weeks ago, as she lie awake in bed tossing and turning, she spoke to G-d. She said: I understand that I can't have my Dvir back... I get it... Things in life are not always the way we want them to be, and we sometimes can't understand their mysteries... I accept that... But please G-d... grant me this one request... please... give me one hug from Dvir. If I could have just one hug from my Dvir I'd be ok... because I'll know that he's ok..." She cried herself to sleep.

The next day she took a walk at the park near her home, which she often did... She sat down on a bench and was busy in her thoughts, when a little two year old boy with the cutest smile and the prettiest locks runs up to her like he wants to play with her. The child's mother calls out to the child from a few benches away not to bother the woman but the boy keeps coming back to her each time he runs around the park. The mother calls to him: "Dvir, Dvir'le, come here... don't bother the g'veret (woman). Dalia starts to shake... The child keeps playing with her; the child's mother eventually walks over to the bench where her child is talking and playing with this woman they've never met before.

"Wha...what did you say the boy's name is?"

“Dvir... It’s Dvir.”

“If I may ask... Why did you call him Dvir?”

“I’ll tell you... I work in the army as an officer that informs families of their wounded or killed sons and follows their needs. While I was pregnant with Dvir, at a very late stage in the pregnancy, the doctors informed me that they suspect a very serious defect with this baby. I was devastated... As I leave the doctor’s office and return to work, I hear that a soldier named Dvir was killed in Gaza. I started thinking about the mother of that young man and how devastated she must be... Immediately I made a deal with G-d: If you give me a healthy child I promise to name him Dvir in memory of that soldier.”

Dalia begins to sob uncontrollably... “I’m Dvir’s mother... I’m Dalia Imanuelov from Givat Ze’ev.” She’s sobbing uncontrollably...

Little Dvir’s mother is standing there, at a loss what to do... How she would like to bring some measure of comfort to the woman sobbing in front of her, but how?... She picks up Dvir, brings him close to Dalia and says: “Here... Dvir wants to give you a hug...”

Dear friends, Yiskor reminds us – the souls of our loved ones are alive and well... They’re out there... Like candles they light each other, pass along messages through each other at times... And they live on... We miss them, but they’re ok...

And the more we identify with our souls, the more connected with are with them.

Today, on this holiest day of the year, as the souls of your loved ones stand at the door awaiting to enter for Yiskor (they’re already starting to come in... they didn’t expect my sermon to last this long...) I ask them to bless all of us with an amazing year, health, happiness, prosperity, and nachas from your children and grandchildren...

Most importantly, I ask them to bless each of us with a SUPER year! A year when each of us realizes how amazing we are, when we realize the power we possess...

Dear beloved friends, you're Superman and Superwoman – you're untouchable... a piece of the Divine, a Super Hero sent on a mission from another planet called Heaven to bring goodness wherever there is evil, and spread light, truth, justice, and the ways of Hashem!