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**Sermon delivered by Rabbi Shalom M. Paltiel**

**Chabad of Port Washington**

**First day of Rosh Hashanah, 5775 (2014)**

LET'S BE A LITTLE MESHUGA THIS YEAR!

*Theme: When we analyze human behavior, we realize we do lots of irrational things, even bordering on the meshuga and ridiculous. This sermon explains why we enjoy acting a little crazy, to lift ourselves from the meaningless existence of chasing materialism. It then explores plenty of opportunities for being “meshuga” through Jewish observance which in fact provides true meaning and purpose.*

My good friend Mr. Alan Rosenzweig shared this joke with me this morning:

A man is called up to the TORAH for an ALIYA. He's asked his Hebrew name with which to be called to the Torah, and he says: Esther ben Moshe. The man calling him up is taken aback... What do you mean... I need your Hebrew name. “Yes, it's Esther ben Moshe...

But how can that be?

“You see, times are tough. I've put everything into my wife's name:

Times are indeed tough... which in turn is making us all a little MESHUGA... a little nuts!

**Joke – A man was ah bisel meshugah (everyone knows what MESHUGA means, ye?)**

Eventually he's brought into a special asylum but insists on kosher food. They can't do it but he insists, his religious rights... eventually they cave and agree. Still he's not happy, he needs meals prepared in separate kitchen... omg ok they have to build a special separate kosher kitchen just for him. The next Saturday, the warden walks into the kosher kitchen and sees this Jew sitting there, **smoking a cigar eating a ham and cheese sandwich...**

He's in shock... he's beside himself... you put us through all of this... how can you do this?!?!?

**But you forgot - I'm MESHUGAH!!!**

**The world is going a little MESHUGAH lately, don't you think...**

**Heard about people looking to go to Mars?**

Mars One program

Mars-One is a not-for-profit program looking to send people to settle on Mars

They're looking for a new generation of heroes... modern day Columbus...

Flight will take between 6 and 9 months to get there

In very tight space, won't even be able to take a shower

Even upon arrival life won't be easy

The temperature on Mars is not nice... 70-100 below zero most of the time

Can't go out much

Telephone or video conferencing difficult – delay of 3 minutes

Texts can be sent though...

No way to have children there

**Most important detail: It's a one way ticket!**

Plan to send first four people in 2026, then another 4

Asked for people interested to register

**Crazy?**

**When I first read it I said: these people fell from MARS...**

**How many you think registered to one way trip to Mars?**

**More than 200,000 from 140 countries... can't wait to get out of here...**

**People are looking for something different...**

**Yup! You can say that again!**

**Even if it means a little meshugah...**

**My sermon today: This year, let's be a little MESHUGA...**

**ICE BUCKET CHALLENGE**

Definitely the biggest story of the year, hands down... (and this was quite the year)... It was a huge success, heads of state... famous people from all over the world, taking part in this challenge... I mean WOW!

Why such a success?

Not only because it's important cause

Ordinary fundraising, even creative matching funds campaign didn't come close

**Ice bucket – it's a challenge**

**Plus, it's a little meshugah...**

**Fuggetaboutit... it's a homerun!**

Because we LOVE being a little MESHUGA!

Famous comedian Chris Rock: **"You know the world is going crazy when the best rapper is a white guy, the best golfer is a black guy and that tallest guy in the NBA is Chinese."**

**I told you, world's a little meshugah...**

**A Swedish band is named – you ready for this: MESHUGAH... (I'm told the title is most fitting...)**

**Dear friends, let me explain to you the "KABALLAH" of MESHUGAH**

**Why is it that us humans look for opportunities to act a little meshuga:**

**The prophet tells us: Come a time when “*lo roov lalechem, lo tzomo lamayim ki im lidvar Hashem*” – “Man won’t be hungry for bread, nor thirsty for water, rather for the word of G-d”**

**World realizes materialism isn’t the answer...**

**It’s nice, we all need to have our needs met and to be comfortable**

**But so do animals...**

**Having your creature comforts doesn’t quite fill the human need for fulfillment**

**The human soul thirsts for purpose, transcendence**

**To provide some meaningful response to the nagging question: why am I here anyway...**

**The Bible compares a human soul to a candle**

**Flame rises, reaching up... not satisfied with the status quo**

**Human soul looks for transcendence, something more...**

**We don’t know how to find that purpose...**

**So we act meshugah...**

**We didn’t achieve our goal of finding purpose...**

**But at least we got away from the gravity that pulls us down in plain old meaningless existence**

**Hippy generation of the 60’s:**

**Rabbis and religious leaders very angry by 60’s movement.**

The Lubavitcher Rebbe had the opposite reaction. He saw it as a prime opportunity for Jewish outreach. Because the rebellious youth of the 60's have clearly overthrown any authority and not interested in conforming...

Ah! Best candidates for truth...

Friends, if we're gonna be crazy and unconventional, Judaism offers lots of opportunities



## **David Nessenoff – visiting his son in yeshiva Morristown.**

Dr. David Nessenoff was a guest speaker here a couple months back and told the following story:

His old college roommate (a secular Jew) called and asked what I was up to. I told him that I was heading up to my son's Chabad yeshiva. He then started yelling at me, "You got to get him out of there! They'll brainwash him! They have bars on the windows! Are you crazy?!"

I tried to switch the topic, so I asked him what he was doing. He said to me, "My wife and I are flying out to California to visit our son for parent visiting weekend." I asked him as to where his son was. And he replied, "He's in Los Angeles at a drug rehabilitation facility."

The irony, absurdity, and reality escaped him.

**Let's face it –we all act a little crazy in daily life –**

**Example: Obsession with car accessories**

**Grown mature intelligent adults, are bent out of shape because the car came without an extra trim on the tire...**

**C'mon, let's face it,**

**Its nuts!**

**Guy took flight to Sydney Australia to be the first one to get the iPhone 6...**

**I ask you, this is normal?**

**We love being meshuga...**

**It's how we express our humanity...**

**Let's do it in yiddishkeit...**

**Story –**

Years ago I befriended a Jew in Port Washington named Gary, we'd debate things Jewish and otherwise philosophical. He said while he admired Judaism, some of the ideas like not using a car on Shabbat seemed absolutely ridiculous to him.

**I'm walking in rain one Shabbos to shul**

I meet Gary, he's jogging in shorts and tshirt:

Guy (jogging in place): "Rabbi, you're crazy"

Me: "And you're crazy too"

We're all gonna be a little nuts, why not do it in meaningful ways, yidishkeit

**Walking & talking to myself:**

I used to feel funny walking to shul on Shabbos, talking to myself (whispering the introductory prayers - korbonos)...

People will think I need to be institutionalized...

Now I feel completely at home -

**Everyone I pass is walking briskly along, wires hanging from ear, talking to themselves...**

**People tell me: Idea of walking to shul on Shabbos – it's crazy**



**“Rabbi, I live two miles from the Shul, how can I possibly walk there...”**

**I look at him: “You kiddin’ me?! Who doesn’t walk two miles nowadays...**

**Everyone’s walking, on a track, a treadmill, wherever whenever, we’re walking**

**For cryin’ out loud – you can walk to shul!”**

### **Walk to Ohel:**

Every Simchas Torah I walk, along with my sons, to the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Ohel (gravesite) in Queens

Takes 5 hours...

People look at me like... “wow isn’t that’s a little crazy...”

Until I say to them: “It’s not too bad, it’s 12.5 miles, its half a marathon...”

Oh... good... now it makes sense...

“Pretty good rabbi, you’re getting there...”

### **Berkley Story:**

Story guy attending University of Berkley in the 60s, looking for crazy dress, looking for something original with which to stand out on campus, but all of the good (read: weird) ideas are already taken...

He discovers tzitizs... the prayer shawl you wear like a poncho.

He loves it, it’s the best craziness on campus! It’s so meshuga, you can’t beat it!

Then sukkos came along and he walked around campus and meets a Chabad rabbi with a table sharing the lulav and etrog with people, offering them a chance to shake it all around... “Wow – this is really awesome, it’s as crazy as it gets...” Now

he gets to prance around campus in his tzitzis, shaking a palm branch and a citrus fruit with every Jew he meets... this is good!

**Eventually embraced full Jewish life, yarmulka, mezuzah, tefillin, whispering brochos, kissing doorposts**

**He realized there's no better way to be meshugah...**

**Only now he's accomplishing the real goal of the meshuga-seeking gene deeply embedded in the human psyche:**

**To find meaning and purpose in life!!!**

**Are you a real magician?**

Story when I first came to Port Washington in the summer of 1991

Shabbos I'm walking with long black coat, cars are swerving, honking, almost causing accidents... who brought this guy to town...

One car pulls over, a little girl in passenger seat leans over and asks:

**"Excuse me sir - Are you a real magician?"**

**The Rebbe gave me a job to inspire people to do more mitzvahs**

**A mitzvah is magical**

**It fills life with meaning and purpose**

**So I guess I'm supposed to be a real magician**

**All of us are real magicians- each time we do a mitzvah...**

**These crazy – wonderful acts are absolutely magical, they take us out of the daily grind**

**Shabbat candle magically fills home with light, peace and serenity**

**Shabbat table magically fills the home with love and a magical family connection**

**Tefillin aligns the mind and heart in a magical way**

**Kosher – G-d's diet – magically refines us in the way we think and how we view ourselves and the world**

**Torah study opens our mind to G-d's way of thinking...**

**This is CRAZY!!! It's absolutely MAGICAL!!!**

**They take us to another place, to another planet...**

**Ever hear the DJ at a Bar Mitzvah: Let's go crazy...**

**Friends, this Rosh Hashanah - let's go a little crazy**

**Take the mitzvah challenge... with a new mitzvah you never thought you'd do**

**Nominate all your friends to do the same...**

**Ask yourself as you leave the Shul today...**

**Am I a real magician?!**

**Let's resolve to bring G-d, His Torah and mitzvahs a little more into our daily lives**

**It's a crazy idea...**

**It's truly magical...**

**And may we all be blessed by Hashem, Al-mighty G-d, with a year of good health, happiness, prosperity, joy, good cheer, camaraderie, love, and peace.**

**Indeed, let it be a magical year!**

**Shana Tova!**