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Sermon delivered by Rabbi Shalom M. Paltiel

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How Can We Truly Be Proud of an Ancient Biblical Faith?

Sermon explores the big question: How can we celebrate Judaism, an ancient Biblical faith, at a time when so much hate and evil is being perpetrated by an ancient Biblical faith. It explores four of Judaism's monumental contributions to modern civilization as we know it, and presents a powerful conclusion: While the two other ancient Biblical faiths have either REFORMED (Christianity) or have yet to be REFORMED (Islam) from the evil ways of antiquity, JUDAISM has always been millennia ahead of its time and has actually REFORMED civilization into the decent humane society we live in today

JOKE

A CNN Reporter, BBC Reporter, and an Israeli commando were captured by terrorists in Iraq. The leader of the terrorists told them that he would grant them each one last request before they were beheaded.

The CNN Reporter said, "Well, I'm an American, so I'd like one last hamburger with French fries." The leader nodded to an underling who left and returned with the burger & fries. The reporter ate it and said "Now, I can die."

The BBC Reporter said, 'I'm a reporter to the end. I want to take out my tape recorder and describe the scene here and what's about to happen. Maybe someday someone will hear it and know that I was on the job till the end.'" The terror leader directed an aide to hand over the tape recorder and dictated some comments. The reporter then said, 'Now I can die knowing I stayed true until the end.'

The leader turned and said, "And now, Mr. Israeli tough guy, what is your final wish?"

"Kick me in the achuryim (as.," said the soldier.

"What?' asked the leader, "Will you mock us in your last hour?"

"No, I'm not kidding. I want you to please kick me in the achuryim (as.)," insisted the Israeli. So the leader shoved him into the open and kicked him in the ass.

The soldier went sprawling, but rolled to his knees, pulled a 9 mm pistol from under his flak jacket, and shot the leader dead. In the resulting confusion, he jumped to his knapsack, pulled out his carbine and sprayed the terrorists with gunfire. In a flash, all terrorists were either dead or fleeing for their lives.

As the soldier was untying the reporters, they asked him, "Why didn't you just shoot them in the beginning? Why did you ask them to kick you in your achuryim (as.) first?"

"What?" replied the Israeli, "and have you report that I was the aggressor?"

Was very difficult year for the world and Jews

A Christian Arab religious leader from Morocco gave a powerful speech on YouTube video mocking the Muslim push to boycott Israel and Israeli products

Really... get ready to give up on lots of nice things...

First he made sure to point out that Israel & Jews, whom they refer to as “sons of ape and swine” got nothing to be embarrassed about ... and certainly as compared to their own Muslim people “the best of all peoples”

Talk about Nobel Prizes:

Jews – 12 million people - 184 Nobel Prizes

Muslims – 1.4 billion people – should be 24,920 Nobel Prizes

In fact they have a grand total of – 9

Hmmmmmm....

Sons of Ape & Swine – 184

Best of all Peoples – 9

You want to have a boycott? Get ready to live without a few nice things...

- *A Jew by the name of Levi Strauss invented “jeans” in 1873.*
- *Lipstick was invented by a Jew, Maurice Levy, in 1915.*
- *The ball point pen was invented by a Jew by the name of Laslo Biro in 1938. Will you boycott all ink pens because they were invented by a Jew?*
- *Instant photography (Polaroid camera) was also an invention of a Jew, Edwin Herbert in 1947.*
- *The remote control was invented in 1950 by a Jew, Robert Adler.*
- *The cardiac pacemaker is a Jewish invention from the year 1952. Every Sheikh and Muslim who has heart disease must refuse a pacemaker implant.*
- *The video cassette is a Jewish invention by Charles Ginsburg in 1950. Why then do you record the Koran on a video cassette?*
- *The laser beam is a Jewish invention by Gordon Gould in 1958. Imagine all the uses of the laser today, including in hospital surgery rooms.*

The list goes on...

Intel Pentium computer processor chips

Anti-virus software

All mobile phones & Voice mail systems first invented in Israel

He goes on to say – imagine life without these things...

A biblical verse states: *“yehalelucha zor velo picha”* ... “let others praise us, not our own mouths”

We should not be singing our own praises, it’s not nice... plus also possibly not wise

It can trigger further anti-Semitism – and that we have enough of, thank you very much...

if it must get done let others do the job of telling the world of the wonderful contributions Jewish people have made towards society

However – we SHOULD be telling the world of the contributions of JUDAISM to society!

See the difference?

No, don’t speak about JEWISH contributions

Yes, do speak about JUDAISM’s and TORAH’s contributions (essentially HIS = pointing upwards...)

I might add MONUMENTAL contributions to the world

I'd like to choose just FOUR – of many - examples to illustrate the fact that JUDAISM completely transformed the course of human history for the better, paving the way for much of what we know today as decent modern civilization.

And this, coming from an ancient faith...

When people think of ancient faiths... Biblical faiths... (especially these days) they don't get positive feelings... They think of two types of ancient, Biblical faiths. They think of an ancient Biblical faith that has reformed itself to become humane and decent; and they think of another ancient Biblical faith that we hope someday real soon will reform itself to become humane and decent.

Well, surprise surprise... Judaism is a third type of ancient Biblical faith:

No, it has not been reformed. It need not be reformed.

IT ACTUALLY REFORMED CIVILIZATION

It has transformed civilization from its ancient barbaric ways to pave the way towards the decency with which we live today in modern times.

EXAMPLE #1 of JUDAISM'S MONUMENTAL CONTRIBUTION TO REFORM CIVILIZATION:

Women's rights:

World's dismal record on women's rights is well known

Torah taught us –

Isaac – “call the girl and ask her what she'd like to do” – ask Rebecca whether and when she'd like to marry Isaac - (wow – talk about ahead of its time)

Jacob – G-d says go back home, he calls Rachel and Leah and discusses the decision, to hear their thoughts and to get their approval for the plan...

Abraham – the first JEW ever – almost 4000 years ago – when he had his first fight with his wife... G-d gave him clear instructions: (my wife's favorite verse):
"Whatever Sara says listen to her"

Think about that... a time when women were treated like...cattle...

Judaism taught to treat them like royalty

Ever wonder why when a Jewish wife says jump the husband says how high? It's not a new phenomenon... it's been the way we've lived since Abraham... it's direct instructions by G-d, it's the way he taught us how to live

Joke – guy comes to heaven and sees two lines of men. One for men who were the true heads of their households; one for men who did exactly as their wives instructed them to do. The first line has only a few people on it, while the second stretches as far as the eyes can see. He notices his friend Yankel on the first line, he approaches him: "Yankel, what in the world are you doing on this line, when everyone knows you were an absolute sucker to whatever your wife said?!" To which he answered: "I don't know; my wife told me to stand her..."

Rambam – Maimonides rules in his code (authored 800 years ago, based on the Talmud authored 2000 years ago): love your wife like yourself and respect her more than yourself!!!

The great KABALIST Rabbi Aizik Luria - the famous Arizal – writes (shhhhhh.... I'm gonna say this in a whisper so the men's side of the room doesn't hear): As we near the end of days, the times of Moshiach, the souls of the women are reincarnations of those from the time of Exodus, the courageous women in whose merit we became a nation. And so, over time women will catch up to men and will eventually best their male counterparts...

EXAMPLE #2 of JUDAISM'S MONUMENTAL CONTRIBUTION TO REFORM CIVILIZATION:

Monogamy:

Although polygamy wasn't outlawed in Torah, it was strongly encouraged to see marriage as soul mates, man should cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh

Judaism speaks of man and wife as two halves on the same soul

Over a thousand years ago the greatest Jewish leader of the time finally proclaimed it immoral and against Torah principles...

Following that moment in time, you can trace it, society began to follow along, slowly but surely, until it became the norm in most of the civilized world...

(BTW - when it comes to synagogues, monogamy is not required... I'm happy to see people here today who were at other synagogue or temples yesterday...)

EXAMPLE #3 of JUDAISM'S MONUMENTAL CONTRIBUTION TO REFORM CIVILIZATION:

Slavery

Think about this, slavery common place in THIS COUNTRY up until 150 years ago...

Not to mention the practice still exists in some parts of the world

Same deal as monogamy, the Torah did not prohibit it, but it does lay down the law that a slave must be treated with respect... he's got to be fed before his master eats, he can't hit him or overwork him, and he must be treated with dignity. To the point that the Talmud states: "One who purchases a slave for himself has just purchased for himself a master..."

We're talking 3300 years ago!

Talk about ahead of its time

Talk about paving the way, talk about trailblazing!

EXAMPLE #4 of JUDAISM'S MONUMENTAL CONTRIBUTION TO REFORM CIVILIZATION:

Shabbat – a weekly day of rest:

Can we even imagine a world without one?

Where man is just another part of the food chain that keeps going round and round 24-7-365

Judaism introduced it to the world 3300 years ago

For thousands of years it was hotly debated

Greeks, Romans, many felt it will cause society to become sluggish and unproductive, that the Jews will destroy society with this idea called Shabbos

In fact Shabbos was one of the Greeks' main battles against the Maccabees leading up to the miraculous victory of Chanukah...

It was also one of Haman's big arguments during the time of Purim: "These people are always on vacation, they're always resting because it's Shabbos, or a holiday..."

Some saw the brilliance in it even then, but most did not

Today we can't imagine a society without a day off each week

Dear friends –

Let us develop a healthy sense of Jewish pride...

But let's do it right

Let's not pat ourselves on the back on how brilliant we are...

(Although I did take the time, on this holy day of the New Year, to go through that entire list of Nobel Prizes and accomplishments...

...because at a time when we're being kicked around as the worst thing to ever happen to mankind... I thought we deserve a break... we deserve ah shtikel glet... a little pat on the back)

But – in truth - let's not pat ourselves on the back on how brilliant we are...

That's fun sometimes.. but it's not called being a light unto the nations...

(It's a NUDNIK unto the nations...)

Instead - let's pat HIS back... (the One above)

Let's praise HASHEM – let's tell the whole world of the monumental DIVINE ideas He taught us in His MANUAL FOR LIFE called the TORAH which he presented to us 3300 years ago and asked us to try to share it with the world

Wow – you want to be proud –

Use your imagination

Imagine a society of polygamy, slavery, no equality for women, and no weekly day of rest...

OUR TORAH is responsible for these and countless other ideas which shaped the world and will continue to shape the world to become more and more in line with its Creator's way of thinking...

Don't ever be embarrassed to wear a kippah...

or to ask a business associate to meet you for lunch at a kosher restaurant...

or to tell a friend you're unavailable on Friday nights because that's when you do Shabbat with your family...

YOU GOT NOTHING TO BE EMBARRASSED ABOUT

It's true, ancient Biblical faiths have got troubles, and they've either been reformed or have yet to be reformed

But JUDAISM has REFORMED THE WORLD!

It's millennia ahead of the world... it's the trailblazer!

Live Judaism proudly!

I want to finish with a few words about Shabbat:

It took the world a few thousand years to see the wisdom in a weekly day of rest

It's taking the world some time still to see the wisdom in some of the details of that day of rest – no driving, no electricity, no TV or computer or FACEBOOK... c'mon, why not?!

Truth is, the world is beginning to see the wisdom in this as well:

The UNPLUG movement is now becoming more and more popular – teaching that we need to spend one day a week unplugged from technology

Teaching that in order to retain some sanity, to hold on to a few brain cells, one must take 24 hours a week when they're completely divorced from anything that beeps or flashes or clicks or ticks...

Many good therapists are suggesting this to their patients...

Wow – Didn't Shabbos say that a long time ago...

Again, way ahead of its time

The UNPLUG website says what to do to use all the free time on UNPLUG days

It suggests six activities to be more involved in (see how similar this sounds to Shabbat):

Return to your center

Kitchen

Hospitality

Out of doors time

Romance

Vacation at Home

Here goes:

Return to your center – prayer and Torah study

Kitchen - three hearty delicious meals

Hospitality – Inviting Shabbat guests

Out of doors time - a nice walk after the cholent lunch, of course...

Romance – very much part of Shabbat

Vacation at Home

Years ago a local guy, quite wealthy, was telling me about a fantastic vacation he took (and he's taken every type of expensive vacation imaginable). He said it was quite expensive but well worth it, because it truly relaxed him. On this interesting vacation, they gave him absolutely nothing... no electronics, no telephone, no TV or computers, all natural, just food, books and more books... He said: "Rabbi it was very expensive but absolutely amazing and definitely worth it..."

To which I replied: “Hey - guess what we have it every week – for free! It’s called Shabbos!”

(Boy did he feel cheated...)

I close with this, my dear friends:

Annual SHABBOS PROJECT out of South Africa

On Shabbat 24/25 of October

Last year hundreds of thousands kept one Shabbat

I ask you to plan on it...

I encourage you to try it, one Shabbat to be kept completely and properly

Invite neighbors to celebrate together locally in your own area

Walk to shul or if it’s too far – pray at home with family and friends

See what kind of powerful experience it can be

To experience a true Shabbat, which G-d refers to as “My precious treasure”

Story:

Reb Chaim Weintraub, outreach worker in Kiryat Shmuel in Israel, who had a way with the street bums, he knows how to befriend the gangs, the at risk teens who have lost their direction in life...

3 year old son, a few days after celebrating his upsherenish (3rd birthday haircutting ceremony),

Felt unwell at school, teacher says lie down to rest on cot

When she came to check on the boy he was no longer with us...

During shiva a group of Israeli street youth came

He used to visit their hangouts and talk to them...

They told Rabbi Weintraub in merit of his son they would keep one Shabbat

No smoking, no driving, no cell phones or tv...

They wanted to do this in order to show their love to him and to offer him some comfort with this gesture

When they left someone (not too smart) in the room expressed cynicism...

“What’s big deal that they’ll keep one Shabbat? It’s touching, but meaningless – as soon as Shabbos would end they’d revert back to their normal lives

No – the rabbi said

“You don’t understand how precious a gift this is...

Do you have any idea how much I would be prepared to give up just to have my little son back with us for just one Shabbos?

I would sell everything I own, my apartment, my assets, even my clothing, just to have my precious ingele back even for just one Shabbos.

There is no price too high for the chance to hear him say the parshah one more time, to sing Shabbos zemiros, Shabbat songs, with him on my lap, or walk to shul holding his little hand in mine

And now, our Father in Heaven is going to have eight of his precious sons back with Him for one Shabbos... How happy will He will be!”

Friends, let this be a year when each of us in this room keeps at least one Shabbos

One precious, priceless Shabbos

How valuable is one Shabbos?

Priceless

Shana Tova