

Sermon Delivered by Rabbi Shalom M. Paltiel

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Chabad of Port Washington

WE MAY BE A MESS UNDERNEATH THE SURFACE... BUT DEEP DOWN WE'RE AOK

From my Inbox:

"They weren't in my handbag. Suddenly I realized I must have left them in the car.

Frantically, I headed for the parking lot.

My husband has scolded me many times for leaving my keys in the car's ignition.

He's afraid that the car could be stolen.

As I looked around the parking lot, I realized he was right. The parking lot was empty.

I immediately called the police.

I gave them my location, confessed that I had left my keys in the car, and that it had been stolen.

Then I made the most difficult call of all to my husband, "I left my keys in the car and it's been stolen."

There was a moment of silence. I thought the call had been disconnected, but then I heard his voice, "Are you kidding me?" he barked, "I dropped you off!"

Now it was my turn to be silent. Embarrassed, I said, "Well, come and get me."

He retorted, "I will, as soon as I convince this cop I didn't steal this car!"

Welcome to the golden years....."

Friends, let's make it a golden year!

All the investment experts are talking about gold...

Let's make this a year of gold! One in which we appreciate the priceless enduring value of every moment of every day, and we celebrate it... we don't just shlepp through it, we SHINE through it!

Speaking of GOLD...

The so called Nazi Gold Train has been in the news lately...

Supposedly a 100 meter long train is buried some 50 meters underground someplace in Poland, carrying 300 tons of gold and other precious valuables, looted of course from the Jews

For many years it was seen as the stuff of legend

In recent weeks it is being taken a bit more seriously because of two businessmen who came forward and said they know of the train's whereabouts

They say the information was revealed to them by an old man on his deathbed

They agreed to reveal the information to the Polish government if they're guaranteed 10% of the treasure

Now there's a gold fever been created around this story... Lots of people dreaming to find this underground treasure

We have gold diggers in the literal sense...

The term is often used to mean other things...

"Not only I'd love you... I'd also miss you..."

But we're talking about actual gold digging...

Friends, as we all know, the planet's greatest treasures are buried underground, waiting to be uncovered

Dear friends, there's a Biblical verse "ki atem tihyu li eretz cheifetz - you shall be to Me (G-d) a desired land"

It means to say that within the human psyche and soul are buried priceless treasures

Judaism believes - beneath the surface of our personalities lie treasures of goodness, wisdom and inspiration

As you know, there was a guy name Dr. Freud, some of you may have heard of him

Who didn't quite agree with that statement...

Under the human psyche you'll hardly find treasures, he said. You'll find layers upon layers of mud and muck...

Freud, like most medical schools, emphasized the idea that all things come down to physiology. Humans are like machines, responding to stimuli from within or from without, a completely physical, predictable and godless machine, albeit a very complicated machine...

Creating psychotics, neurotics, and of course... psychiatrists.

The difference between the three? The neurotic build castles in the air; the psychotic lives in them, and the psychiatrist collects the rent.

A famous psychiatrist once asked the Rebbe about this seeming contradiction between psychology and Torah, psychology saying you dig down you get mud, and Torah saying you dig down you get gold... how do you reconcile?

The Rebbe's answer: Depends how deep down you dig...

Just like in the earth – dig down you get plenty of mud and dirt

Keep digging though and you'll hit gold and precious minerals

Yes, within each of us there's some junk... some stuff...

We each have our issues; be it by nature or nurture, we each have our shtick, our demons, that we have to contend with and try to heal from...

Joke 3 mom's boasting about their rich sons and how well they take care of them:

1. He bought a limo and hired a full time driver to take me wherever want to go.

2. My son bought me a gorgeous home over-looking a lake with full time help... it's all about mom. 3. That's nothing! My son spends 4 hours a day 5 days a week with his therapist. All he does is talk about me...

Why is psychotherapy a lot quicker for men than for women?

Because when it comes to going back to childhood, men are already there.

The mud and muck is there...

But still deeper down there is a dimension of the human self – the essence of human identity -- which is transcendent by its very “nature” – free, uninhibited, never defined by life's circumstances and limitations, wholesome and deeply spiritual

This is the soul, formed in the image of its Creator

Mark Twain said, “When G-d created the Grand Canyon he failed to create the adjective to describe it.”

When G-d created the human soul “btzelem Elokim” - in His own Divine image, here too He failed to give us an adequate adjective for its description

Can one describe the Divine? Of course not.

Similarly there's no describing the depth and breadth of the human soul.

Ladies and Gentleman – true, on one level we're a mess. On another level, we're simply... DIVINE!

Fear, shame, laziness, depression, addiction, denial, dishonesty, pain, resentment, confusion

None of these exist on that deeper plane

Instead... there's courage, optimism, joy, contentment, honesty, clarity, purpose, and peace

It's an important part of our daily prayer to read the story of the splitting of the sea, each and every day. But why? It is an important miraculous part of our people's history, but every day? Isn't that a bit of a stretch...

The deeper meaning here is that each day we must be sure to split your inner sea and reveal that deeper place, each and every day, so we can live that day on that deeper level

If you were given a glimpse into your own "sea" and discovered the universe of personality hidden beneath your conscious brain, what do you think you would find? Black demons, an abundance of shame, fear, guilt, pain, insecurity, an urge for endless physical gratification, an urge to destroy, to survive, to dominate, a cry for unconditional love? Would you discover Freud's Libido, Jung's collective unconscious, Adler's search for power, Frankl's quest for meaning?

Split your inner "sea", go all the way down, and you'll find inherent purity, sacredness and innocence, a soul filled with spiritual light, genuine love and unshakeable confidence. This dimension of self is the spark of G-d within man, a reflection of the harmony, goodness and dignity of its Creator

Story of college girl complaining to the Rebbe about her character, she's not nice or caring. She had gone to experts for advice and nothing helped. Rebbe's advice: help students during meal times by bringing the stuff to the table that are needed commonly by everyone at the table, salt, sugar, ketchup, whatever. She was unimpressed and walked out angry... She tried it anyway and it worked wonders.

Why? Why did she suddenly become kind and caring just because she acted that way?

It's because deep down she actually IS kind and caring... Her actions triggered her deeper, TRUER identity!

You may have seen this funny YouTube going around last year...

A Chabanik Yeshiva boy named Shmuly approaches a man in downtown Brooklyn, who happened to be a documentary filmmaker named Josh Wolff, in downtown Brooklyn, asking if he's Jewish and would he like to hear the Shofar... Wolff first shrugged him off, then he decided to have some fun.

"I'm about to go for my run. Can you run?"

You see it in the video...The Chabadnik blowing Shofar running alongside the jogger on Washington Avenue...

The guy was having fun with the Yeshiva bochur...

He was having so much fun that he decided to do a selfie video of the whole thing...

He was having fun at his expense... "What a fool, how ridiculous... the kid ran with me for 10 blocks amongst Brooklyn's avenues, blowing these strange sounds with and even stranger looking horn... even as he was trying to catch his breath keeping up with this seasoned jogger...

I mean a yeshiva bochur... the extent of his exercise regiment is to rise and be seated for the amidah...

Just because he was convinced it was an important mitzvah and would bless me with a good year?”

The story went somewhat viral... with lots of comments poking fun at the whole thing...

The PS to the story is: Two weeks later Josh contacted Shmuly, he said he thought about the experience afterwards and realized it was actually “pretty cool... pretty amazing actually... it felt great”. He visited Shmuly at 770 where he put on his tefillin for the first time...

What happened? A totally secular Jew suddenly “felt good” about the sound of the ram’s horn and decided it’s “pretty amazing”?!

It touched his neshomo – his soul – the deeper place within. That’s what happened!

You see on the surface he had no knowledge or connection to his Jewishness or his soul. Beneath the surface, in his subconscious, he likely harbored resentment towards these ancient Jewish rituals which may have been shoved down his throat by his grandfather or his Hebrew school teacher, and which should just as well been left behind when his great grandparents came across the ocean from the old country.

But the sound of the shofar triggered an even deeper place, lying dormant in the deeper stratum of his subconscious...

And resentment gave way to warm feelings of wellbeing, of belonging, of deep spirituality.

“Wow this is cool... no... it’s... pretty amazing!”

My dear friends...

We may travel through life unaware of this dimension of self. Throughout our years on this planet we may behave as though this element of self does not exist.

Though its symptoms reverberate through our consciousness—most often in the feelings of emptiness and lack of contentment when our spiritual self is not satiated—we are prone to dismiss it or deny it. After all, at least in the short term, it is far easier to accept that we are nothing more than intelligent beasts craving self-gratification than spiritual souls craving for truth.

We're cheating ourselves of our richest asset!

Think of your life as a busy mining site... A whole host of teams... hundreds of workers going to and fro, like busy bees, moving, drilling, hauling, mining...

No doubt there are large crews removing mud and dirt... by the truckload... it's a necessary part of the operation.

And then there are those responsible for the actual mining... finding the gold...

Who is the owner spending more time with, the dirt removing people... or the miners?

Both are important...

But I'd bet 10 to 1 his daily lunches aren't with those overseeing the truckers moving the dirt...

The Boss? He's spending his time with the miners... that's where his main interest lies...

Dear friends, now think about our lives

We spend so much of our time removing the mud and the dirt from our subconscious...

Much of our time and energy is spent on making ourselves happy, filling that inner void

...with relaxation techniques, the occasional tub of ice cream, an exotic car to celebrate the mid-life... a competent therapist who helps us sort through the issues that plague our inner selves

All of these are important... we gotta remove the mud

But shouldn't we give at least as much time and attention to mining the priceless treasures buried deep inside our hearts and souls?!

Do a mitzvah, help a friend, tefillin, Shabbos, kosher, mezuzah, visit the sick, helping the needy... Torah study... and you're hitting GOLD!

Ever happen to you... that you're in such a lousy mood that... you're mad at the whole world...

Then you decide to visit someone who is sick... or you do a favor for someone... and suddenly... like magic... you feel so good you wanna sing...

Ever happen to you? You know what I'm talking about?...

You did a mitzvah... you did something soulful that touches that special place within

A place that can only be described as pure, untarnishable GOLD!

And YOU START TO SHINE!

I once had opportunity of putting tefillin on a Jew, a highly successful attorney, who hadn't done it since his Bar Mitzvah. At first he was reluctant, but he went along with it, probably to be polite and make the rabbi happy. After the two minute prayer he shook my hand tightly, looked me in the eye, and said:

"Rabbi, I thank you! ... That was the only two minutes of peace I've had in months....

And I spend one day a week on the golf course."

You see, the golf course is nice... but it speaks to the place within where we're looking for happiness and inner peace...

The Tefillin? That touches a place with we already have happiness and inner peace...

That's a whole different feeling of wellbeing... a place within us we never imagined exists...

A place where you're simply DIVINE... you're just plain GOLDEN!

I conclude with a story about a poor man living in Jerusalem who was a regular at the local Chabad soup kitchen there. He always complained about the long lines he'd have to wait on at the soup kitchen. One fine day... he won 25 million shekel in the Israeli lottery... today that's worth approx. 6.5 million dollars...

The director of the soup kitchen meets with him and asked for a contribution to the soup kitchen...

The man said he would happily contribute... but on one condition... that he no longer have to wait on line to get his soup...

There's a place of poverty within each of us... of course there is, there's no denying that

But ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, as we enter this new year, let's resolve to remember... that deep down at our core... we won the lottery... we're millionaires...

So even as we spend time trying to nourish that place of poverty and neediness... filling the inner void... self-help, therapy, whatever works for each of us... let's spend at least equal time exploring and enjoying our extraordinary inner wealth...

Let's make this a year when we invest in the GOLD... when we celebrate the GOLD

The untarnishable inner place within each of us... that shines brightly each time we polish it with a mitzvah, acts of goodness and kindness, or an act of Jewishness!

L&G - Welcome to the GOLDEN YEARS!