

Sermon before Yiskor – Yom Kippur 5776

Chabad of Port Washington

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Shana Tova. Thank you for that wonderful introduction and reception.

Reminds me of the time I was invited to deliver a talk and the chairman introduced me as this wonderful rabbi who is truly outstanding etc, he went on and on, and concluded "I have no doubt G-d has a special place in heaven for such a rabbi"

When I got up to the podium, blushing a bit from the intro, I began by saying:
"Dear G-d, please wait with that place..."

JANUARY IN PARIS – Charlie Hebdo

Looking back at the year that passed, we all surely remember January in Paris, the tragic shootings, the murders in cold blood in the offices of Charlie Hebdo publication, and in the Jewish supermarket

2 million people gathered for rally of national unity, and almost 4 million gathered in rallies across France protesting against this senseless violence

Was a breath of fresh air to those of us who think life is a nice thing... and who believe random murder isn't nice...

With the world's newfound relaxed attitude to such things, I was beginning to think I'm the crazy one... so I'll admit it was a good feeling to see millions of French and other Europeans, and 40 heads of state coming out and saying they agreed with my crazy idea... that murder and death and suicide are not nice...

Why did that event trigger such a huge response with millions coming out to demonstrate against radical Islamic terror?

Mah nishtana?

Remember the slogan that was widely used at the time? "*She swie sharlee*" – We are Charlee...

They personalized it...

That's why it caught on the way it did! It became personal, it resonated!

The slogan began popping up everywhere... all over the world, all over the internet, wherever decent people wanted to express their outrage

So long as it's a tragedy happening someplace else to someone else, yes I'm bothered but that's life... You give a sigh... at times even a couple tears... and then life must go on

But when it was personalized... *she swie sharlee*...

When people realized that if we're living in a world where you can get killed for what you say or publish, then we're all fair game, this place has finally become a bona fide jungle... no, that's an insult to the jungle, in the jungle they don't kill just to kill... it's becoming a bona fide crazy house...

Suddenly it became personal... we're ALL Charlie... we're ALL not safe in the crazy house

Truth is, we ARE Charlie... we ARE each other...

When G-d inquired about the first murder in history, and the answer was... I dunno... Am I my brother's keeper?

Came back the retort: You don't know? *Kol dmei ochicho* ... your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth... it's your brother, and he's been murdered... and you don't know what happened?!

'lo saamod al dam reiacho' don't stand idly by your brother's blood...

For a few days in January it felt like the global community was beginning to get it...

When innocent life is taken it's a direct attack on every single decent human being alive... It's not THEY who were attacked, WE were attacked.

She swie sharlee...

I want now to shift focus to another memorable part of those demonstrations, something very close to us as a Jewish community, which I believe can serve as an inspiration to us as Jews for this new year:

It was very heartening to see some signs reading as well *she swie shwif*... we are JEWS... being held up in Paris, as well as around the world, by many non-Jews, in solidarity with those murdered in cold blood in the Jewish market... Just because they were Jewish...

Dear friends, the message of Paris is – personalize it!

If you want people to care about the murder of innocents, you gotta personalize it, WE ARE CHARLIE...

In the same way, if we want Jews to care about living Jewish lives we must personalize it: WE ARE THE JEW!

In the language of those heartwarming signs held up proudly in Paris:

She swie shwif...

Let's personalize it... that's how we make it resonate, with us, with our children...

At times we could think how important is our Jewishness anyway, there are so many Jews, I'm just one of millions... do I really matter as a Jew?

Does my Jewish practice really matter to G-d? Does He even know my name to care if I light my Shabbat candles or wrapped my tefillin? There's power in the numbers, when thousands or millions practice Judaism and keep it alive, I get it, but do I really matter as one single individual?

The message of the HAKHEL year is a resounding YES!

The lesson of Paris is absolutely - *She swie shwif*... You are the JEW!

If Paris taught us anything it's that the only way to realize how important things are is to personalize it

Keep it general, and it's a global issue, it's someone else's issue, it won't hit home

Personalize it, *She swie Sharlee*... Suddenly it speaks to us

She swie shwif... L&G Let's personalize it, WE are the Jew. You are the Jew.

You're as precious and important as if you were the only Jew alive...

But how could that be, there are millions of us!

It's because we're G-d's children. And to a parent, each child is an only child...

People will often say to me "Oh I heard you have 11 children..."

To which I say: "I only have one of each"

I remember when my daughter Chana was born, it's now 14 + years ago. We're at LIJ hospital, she was born late Friday night, so it's Shabbos, no phone calls or visitors from family or friends, it's just the 3 of us, Sara, myself, and little still

unnamed Chana... It's about 3am, I'm holding Chana'le in my arms, Sara had finally drifted into a very much needed sleep... I'm looking at this little bundle of blessing, and I'm overcome with love... I'm thinking: How much do I love this girl, just 4 hours old who hadn't even opened her eyes to look at me... How much do I love her? At the time I had 6 children... I remember thinking – do I love her one sixth of my heart?... No... my entire heart, my entire being actually, from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet, were overwhelmed with an outpouring of love for this little thing...

NY State gathers statistics to determine how we're doing in terms of health... or education. They determine based on averages...

When it comes to our kids do we do the same thing? Do we do the numbers and say "ok on average we're doing ok"? Of course not!

But why not? Because it's your own kids! Each one is as precious as if it's the ONLY one

As the saying goes: "You're only as happy as your least happy child"

Torah was given in singular at Sinai Anochi Hashem Elokecho... YOUR personal G-d. It was never given to "a people"! It was given to each individual... each Jew felt and knew "imi hadibur medaber" – He's talking to ME!

Story of Sara's Bubbie Sylvia who cried each time she lit her Shabbos candles:

I asked her why she cried... each and every time... I could understand at times there was something special she might be praying for so she'd get emotional, but to tear up like that every time she lit those candles, why?

And she told me... It's because her zeideh told her as a young child: Each time you lights the Shabbat candles, Hashem stands there and answers Amen to your blessing; after you lights them, and uncover your eyes to welcome Shabbat, He turns to you and says Good Shabbos... and gives you a kiss on the forehead...

"Shalom" she said to me... "How could I not cry..."

Friends, it's personal... it's one on one...

You're not one of millions of Jewish women lighting those candles...

You're not one of millions of Jewish men putting on those tefillin...

She swie shwif...

You are JEWRY! You're the only one... like an only child...

We had a Bar Mitzvah a few months ago for a boy named Benjamin JOORY. I was looking for a memorable way to impress upon him this message... how important he is to G-d and to the Jewish people...

(We had fun with his name... I asked the crowd if they thought the boy would grow up as a good Jew. "The Joory's still out...")

I simply said: Remember Benjamin, YOU ARE JOORY!

When you think how important could my tefillin be... I'm just one kid, the main thing is the state of world Jewry... that's important...

Truth is YOU ARE JOORY (JEWRY)!

Because you're G-d's child, and every child is an only child...

L&G - When you're trying to decide about doing a mitzvah - Tefillin, Shabbat, Shul, Sukkah... Whatever you're up to in your Jewish journey... and you're having a hard time becoming motivated to take the next step... maybe you're busy, tired, not sure how important your mitzvah really is in the scheme of things...

Personalize it!

If you think of yourself and your mitzvah as one of 15 million, no big deal

But if you're an only child... YOU'RE JOORY!

Imagine you're the only Jew alive... you don't go to shul and there's no shul... no Torah reading, no Shabbat table... No sukkah this year... it's done...

How would you decide? This is a big deal... It's all in my hands, I'm JEWRY...

She swie shwif...

Because I really am the only one... because we are G-d's children, and to a parent, each child is the only child...

No one can light YOUR Shabbat candle

No one can do YOUR tefillin or YOUR mikvah or YOUR prayers or YOUR kosher...

So if I don't light my candle what will happen when G-d comes to my home and stands near my Shabbat table... and waits to listen to my blessing so He can answer Amen and wish me Shabbat Shalom... and I'm not there...

Who will He give the kiss on the forehead... the one that's meant for me...

Story of the Rebbe who was asked by a reporter how he doesn't tire standing on his feet, in his late eighties, for five hours at a time, with no breaks, handing out dollar bills to thousands of people, one at a time... Giving each person the full attention as they pass by... The Rebbe famously answered: "You don't get tired when you're counting diamonds..."

This is Chabad's secret... did you ever wonder why Chabad is booming while huge studies are showing a major decline in Jewish involvement?

Pew study of last year showed onset of serious apathy and indifference in the Jewish world, intermarriage is way up, affiliation is way down, Jewish interest in Israel is down, philanthropy is down, everyone's wringing their hands and shaking their heads... what do we do, all is lost...

While at the very same time Chabad is booming... It's out of control... it's like Starbucks, wherever you go there's a Chabad... and people are flocking to it...

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There used to be a time when mainstream American Jews who attended Chabads... didn't talk about it... Today? Talk about coming out of the closet... Every Jew has some connection to a Chabad, they attend themselves... but it's their "other shul"... their good friends are involved... the wife goes there to study... Which Jew today doesn't have some Chabad connection...

And all of this tremendous growth, at a time of serious decline in affiliation and interest?! How do you reconcile?

You see – it's quite simple: Judaism by FEAR, by GUILT – is OUT! It's an outdated terrible idea whose time has come and gone...

Judaism by LOVE, Judaism with a Smile... Judaism as a personal relationship with G-d, that's IN! It's more in than ever! Who doesn't want a meaningful relationship...

That's what the Rebbe taught us

Closing Story:

There is a fellow who owns a jewelry store in Eretz Yisroel. One day, not long ago a nine year old girl walked into the store and said, "I am here to buy a bracelet". She looks through the glass cases and points to a bracelet that was three or four thousand dollars. The man behind the counter asked her, "You want to buy that bracelet?" And she says, "Yes". He says, "Wow, you have very good taste. Who do you want to buy it for?" She says, "For my older sister". He says, "Oh that is so nice! Why do you want to buy your older sister this bracelet?" The little girl says, "Because I don't have a mother or father, and my older sister takes care of us. So we want to buy her a present, and I'm willing to pay for it". She pulls out of her pocket a whole bunch of coins that totaled seventy seven shekel, eighty six agurot, which is a little less than twenty dollars. The fellow says, "Wow! That's exactly what the bracelet costs". He begins to wrap up the bracelet and says, "You write a card to your sister while I wrap the bracelet". In a short amount of time,

he finishes wrapping the bracelet, he wipes away his tears, and hands the little girl the bracelet.

A few hours later the older sister comes in and says " I'm terribly embarrassed. My sister should not have come here. She shouldn't have taken it without paying." He says to her, "What are you talking about?" She says, "What do you mean? This bracelet costs thousands of dollars. My little sister doesn't have thousands of dollars, she doesn't even have twenty dollars. So she obviously didn't pay for it". The fellow who owns the jewelry store says:

"You couldn't be more wrong. She paid me in full. She paid seventy seven shekel, eighty six agurot, and a broken heart.

"I want to tell you something. I am a widower, I tragically lost my young wife 6 months ago. People come into my store every single day. They come in and buy expensive pieces of jewelry, but all these people can afford it. When your sister walked in, for the first time in so very long since my wife had died, I once again felt what love means". He gave her the bracelet and wished her well.

Dear friends, on Yom Kippur we come before G-d and we ask for things we can't afford...

We ask for a lot of things for the new-year, things we can't afford... healthy families, happy relationships, success, for things that look bad to turn around, peace of mind, it's a lot... Who has the mitzvahs, the merits, to deserve all of this, to pay for all of this... who can afford it...

When we come with love... tzum taten in himel... to our Father in Heaven

With a broken heart and with love...

He's not looking for a lot, whatever we could afford, as I always ask of you, ONE more new mitzvah, that's all... ONE new mitzvah resolution for the new year...

I'm going to email out a mitzvah resolution form after Yom Kippur...

Candles... tefillin... shul once in a while... Monthly Shabbats... or weekdays...

Keep one Shabbos this year...

We pay whatever we can afford... it's not much but it's with a broken heart, it's with love...

G-d, our Father in Heaven turns to us and says: WOW, you don't know how long it's been since I felt true love... thank you...

He hands each of us all that we ask for... all of those blessings, in all that we need and want

And all of our blessings come to us in a pleasant and easy manner... without heartache and unnecessary challenge...

Our blessings are presented to us beautifully gift wrapped... sealed with a kiss from our Father in Heaven to His only child:

YOU!

Shana tova!
