

SHABBAT SERMON
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Dubai: Failure or Success

Someone sent me a gift and I am wondering whether I should use it, so I thought I would ask you: a tee-shirt that says I WORK FOR THE MOSSAD. Do you think this is something I should wear when I go to bed? The answer may depend upon whether you are a gentile or a missing tile! And the answer may tell us whether you are able to fulfill a central mitzvah of the Pesach festival.

Today is Shabbos Parshat Ha-chodesh, the special Sabbath meant to inform us that the month in which the festival of Pesach takes place is about to begin. Now is a time for all of us to start preparing for the holiday. And there are lots of things we've got to do to make sure that when the festival comes we are able to fulfill the mitzvot that are associated with it ... and there are, in fact, so many mitzvot associated with it – more laws than those associated with any other holiday. One whole tractate of the Talmud – one of the largest, comprising more than 240 pages – is dedicated to a study of the laws of Pesach. You all know the routine: our homes have to be cleaned out, dishes and silverware changed over, all of our chometz disposed of. The time has come to start the shopping, the cooking, the scrubbing and scouring ... all part of our preparations for Pesach. These are tough times for us men; tough having to watch our wives go through all this. I know one man who told me that it's so painful for him watching his wife having to work this hard during the days before Pesach that he literally has to leave the house!

But there is one commandment for this holiday, one that is obligatory for men and for women, that you may not be aware of, but I tell it to you today because it is one that, for many, requires real preparation. And that is the commandment to be happy. This is a law stated in these exact words in the Shulchan Aruch – The Code of Jewish Law: “*Chayev Adam l'hiyot sameach v'tov lev b'moed* – a person is obligated to be happy and feel good on the festival.” That is the law in the words of the Shulchan Aruch, and on those words the Mishnah Berura – the greatest Jewish law book of the 20th century – adds the words: “*V'hu mitzvat aseh min ha-torah ... gam b'nashim* – this is a positive commandment from the Torah, even for women!” Talk about equality! Even women are obligated to be happy and to enjoy the festival of Pesach. And here, too, I would say to you that the ability to be happy may depend on whether you are a gentile or a “missing tile.” So here we go:

By now most everyone in the world knows that 26 people gathered in Dubai for the sole purpose of assassinating Mahmoud al-Mabhouh. The late Mr. Mabhouh was a notorious terrorist. It is known, and he took personal responsibility for killing two Israeli soldiers. He has also been known to be involved in procuring arms from Iran for Hamas to use against Israel. So it has been assumed – and rightfully so – that Israel's Mossad was responsible for his assassination. And the assassination was successful ... successful in the sense that al-Mahmoud is dead, and the assassins escaped. Credit for the assassination was given to the head of the Mossad, Meir Dagan, whom most people credit for revitalizing that well known organization. Israelis, for the most part, were heartened by the assassination, thrilled that the Mossad had been so effective. Many sent in applications to work for the Mossad. But not everyone sees it that

way. There are leading commentators and writers who are calling for Mr. Dagan's resignation. One columnist, Amir Oren, writes that Mr. Dagan's operation was "belligerent and heavy-handed" with his article entitled, "Following Alleged Dubai Mess, the Mossad Chief Must Go." Another respected columnist, Yoel Marcus, writing in the Israel's Haaretz Newspaper, said, "If the Dubai operation is Israel's work, it is a strange story, not to say a sloppy one." The same paper's Akiva Eldar, commenting on the Dubai action, writes, "Operations taken from James Bond movies that the foreign media attribute to Israel make this country look like a neighborhood thug." All these political columnists and many others claim the mission was a failure, a diplomatic and political blunder for which Israel will pay in the years to come. They write that the assassination was not meant to look like an assassination ... it was supposed to appear that he died of natural causes. But the Dubai police figured out that this was not the case. And to make matters worse, it seems as if every step of the assassination was photographed, blowing the cover of the agents involved, and their passports have been revealed as forgeries, leaving behind a mess that will take years to clean up.

So what do you think? Was the mission a success, or a blunder? Should I wear this tee shirt with pride, or turn it inside out? The answer, I guess, depends on whether you're a gentile or a missing tile!

Dennis Prager, a talk show and radio host and newspaper columnist, has a book entitled, "Happiness is a Serious Problem." In that book, he writes of the disease he calls "the missing tile syndrome." I once told you of this syndrome. Prager describes it in these words: "One of human nature's most effective ways of sabotaging happiness is to look at a beautiful scene and fixate on whatever is flawed or missing, no matter how small.

This tendency is easily demonstrated. Imagine looking up at a tiled ceiling from which one tile is missing - you will most likely concentrate on that missing tile. In fact, the more beautiful the ceiling, the more you are likely to concentrate on the missing tile and permit it to affect your enjoyment of the rest of the ceiling.

Now when it comes to ceilings or anything else that can exist in a complete form, concentrating on missing details can be desirable. We don't want a physician to overlook the slightest medical detail or a builder to overlook a single tile. But what is desirable or even necessary in the physical world can be very self-destructive when applied to the emotional world. Ceilings can be perfect, but life cannot. In life, there will always be tiles missing - and even when there aren't, we can always imagine a more perfect life and therefore imagine that something is missing.

With this in mind I ask you: should the Mossad be applauded for what it accomplished in Dubai? If you are the "missing tile" kind of person, definitely not! The mission did not go off without a glitch. Very little in life does! But is that what you are going to focus on ... on the missing tile, or are you going to see the bigger picture? This Mahmoud al-Mabhouh was no plain terrorist, if there is such a thing. According to newspaper reports, it wasn't just Israel but also some Arab countries and terrorist groups that had it in for him. And assuming it was Israel that did it; they wouldn't spend months or years of preparation and involve 26 people in an assassination if the target wasn't a major one. This man didn't only kill two Israelis in the past, he was directly involved in preparing for the killing of numerous Israelis in the future. Was the assassination a success? Well, to me, any assassination is successful if the target is killed and the assassins escape. And here it is, close to two months later, and none of the 26 assassins have been officially identified, much less captured. And Mr. Mabhouh according to most every report is still dead!

I think it is safe to say that in most any other country, what I'll call the "gentile countries," if this was done by their country, their Meir Dagan and those who worked for him would be considered heroes. Such an action would have provided a feeling of gratification, knowing that in light of the assassination all of the leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah are in hiding, and have to change the location of where they sleep most every night, and hold their breath when they turn the key to start their car, and surely do not go around publicly checking in to hotels knowing full well that their lives are in danger because they endanger the lives of Jewish people. It wasn't always like this, you know. I had an old uncle, Mordchai ... I call him "old" because even when he may have been in his 40's he looked like an old man, carrying with him all the memories of pogroms from his Eastern European youth. And I remember a story he told at the Pesach Seder. It was not easy, as you know, for Jews to be happy when they celebrated Pesach in their East European days because there was always the threat of the blood libel – that Jews had killed a Christian child and used the blood for the wine and matzah – that haunted them. And my uncle Mordchai told the story in Yiddish and the story's title was: "*Ah Simcha Bei Yidden*" – A Celebration by the Jews. What's the story? It seems one year in this East European town a child had been found dead on the night of Pesach. All the Jews knew the rage and rioting and killing that would come down upon them. They gathered in the synagogue and engaged in fervent prayer until one Jew rushed into the synagogue and joyously proclaimed: "*Der mes is ah Yid* – the dead child is Jewish!" Good news ... we had nothing to worry about. There will be no pogrom! *Der mes is ah Yid – a simcha bei Yidden.*

That's the way it used to be! Israel has turned it all around and yet there is something about us Jews ... we never seem to be fully content; good is never good enough. We are the people who have introduced such refined words into the English language as: "burtching" and "kvetching." We are the people of whom it is said: the definition of a Jewish telegram is one which says: Start worrying. Details to follow! Why is there something about us that is constantly looking at life from the perspective of the "missing tile?" And it's not only in some of our views of the Mossad ... it is in the view of most everything. Mr. Prager's book's title is instructive: Happiness is No Easy Thing." He's right, you know. We all have our tsores. But you know what? We also all have our happy moments and we should be entitled to enjoy them. But these days even that's asking too much. Think about it for a minute. You tell some people you're pregnant, you're graduating, retiring, being promoted, engaged - joyous moments, happy moments - to which we used to invariably get the response of "mazel tov" – "good for you! I'm so happy for you!" That's what we used to get. Not anymore. Now, some people respond:

- Pregnant? Did you mean to get pregnant? Are you going to give up your job? Did you have the tests for birth defects? You know you'll never get your figure back.

- A graduation? There are those who immediately tell the graduate: Yes, you have a diploma but do you have a useful skill? The job market is the worst ever.

- An engagement? It's about time! Are you expecting? You must have been tired of looking. Your biological clock running out?

- A job promotion? Sure, who did you know on the top? Who did your father have to call to pull it off? I hope the job lasts!

- Retirement? You're going to be bored to tears. Your spouse is going to hate having you around.

It seems as if the only time these people can find something nice to say is when they're told someone died. "Oh, he's better off now. You're lucky it wasn't drawn out."

I tell you all this today to help you prepare properly for Pesach, because when Pesach comes you are going to sit down at the Seder and you're going to see people that you may not have seen for a while. It may be your parents, it may be your children or siblings ... but the real question is: what are you going to see? Are you going to see the good ... or are you going to see the "missing tile?" Because you know, we all have them ... none of us are perfect. None of us are saints. And with the Pesach Seder, children, parents and grandparents must face each other and face all the issues that separate and divide them. So, what are you going to see ... are you going to see a "missing tile?" I would tell you that this is one of those times to be a gentile. Don't go looking for all that is wrong when there is so much that is right in our lives.

Perhaps it is with this in mind that one of the last things we do to usher in the festival of Pesach is to burn our chometz. But as you know, tradition has it that we don't simply burn the little chometz that we found, we also burn the feather that helped scoop it up ... and we also burn the candle which we used for the search. And I remember my father, of blessed memory, telling me something beautiful. He said, "We can understand burning the chometz – its chometz! One can understand burning the feather – it touched the chometz! But why burn the candle? It didn't come in contact with the chometz ... it was only used to search for it." And he said that was exactly why we have to get rid of it. The only purpose this candle served is to look for bad. And something like that we have to get rid of before we usher in the festival of Pesach.

Pesach is right around the corner! I don't think I'll go to sleep at night wearing the Mossad t-shirt because Sherry might use that as an excuse to assassinate me, claiming it was an act of self-defense! But I'm going to be happy, nonetheless. There is plenty in my life worth rejoicing over ... and I trust in yours as well. We are commanded to be happy, so let's get to it! And let's remember what we have to do. And then we will be blessed with the fulfillment of our holiday prayer: "*V'hasieinu Hashem Elokeinu et birkat moadechah* ... the Lord will bless our festival with joy and celebration." Amen

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