

SHABBAT SERMON
DECEMBER 31, 2011
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Ring Out the Old ...

It is hard to know how to properly greet you today. To say “Happy New Year,” we were told in the Yeshiva, sounds too “*goyish*.” To wish you a Shana Tova sounds a bit too Jewish! So let me fall back on the age-old Yiddish wish: “*Ah gut yahr un ah gezunt yahr*” – Let it be a good year and a healthy year.

But while the New Year is about to begin and we are supposed to “ring out the old and ring in the new,” I still have some unfinished business from this past year which I want to take care of this morning. Amidst a year filled with earthquakes, tsunamis, nuclear crisis, street protests and the Arab Spring, the most significant event of this past year came toward the end of the year, with the arrival of my sixth grandchild – my second grandson. Nothing can compare to that! But today I want to tell you about three news clippings I came across this past year that I wanted to comment on, but somehow they didn’t fit in to any of my sermons. The first story is the most ridiculous one of the year. The second, in some way, is the saddest one of the year. And the third, in some way, is the nicest one of the year. Collectively, they say much about the present American and Jewish condition.

Our first story took place on Nov. 29 when the New York Daily News reported that an 85 year old Long Island grandmother was bruised and bleeding after the TSA security at JFK airport stripped-searched her to make sure she was not transporting a bomb. Now get this: this woman is a hunchbacked, 4 ft. 11 inches, she weighs 110 lbs and in her words, “I walk with a walker ... I really look like a terrorist!” To make matters worse, there is a second chapter to the story when several days later it was reported that over the Thanksgiving holiday an 88 year old

woman ... this one wearing a colostomy bag ... had her pants removed to make sure she wasn't a terrorist.

Now why do I tell you these stories? Because the first woman's name was Lenore Zimmerman and the second woman's name was Ruth Sherman – both Jewish and on Florida flights. This is obviously a raging case of anti-Semitism. This is our grandmothers we are talking about! It is our mothers and grandmothers who are under attack every time they enter an airport!

I tell you these stories because 10 years after 9/11 we are still very concerned about our security but no one wants to do what makes the most sense and what the state of Israel has done successfully for decades now – profile the passengers; which ones are more likely to be terrorists? In the name of political correctness, we keep overlooking Occam's razor which teaches that the solution to most problems is the obvious one! Really, does undressing old ladies at airports make us more secure or make any sense?

To show you that not everything in the Jewish world makes sense these days let me tell you about a story I read on a blog written by Rabbi Reuven Spolter. Rabbi Spolter describes a visit he made to the Bais Yisroel neighborhood in Jerusalem, a neighborhood which houses the Mir Yeshiva – the largest Yeshiva in the world. This is a totally ultra-Orthodox neighborhood. Rabbi Spolter was there on a Friday and went to a small butcher store to purchase a chicken for Shabbat. He asked for a Rubin chicken ... Rubin being the name of the Rabbinic certification. The butcher said that he doesn't carry Rubin chickens ... he carries Badatz, Eidah Chareidis – chicken of a different certification. The butcher assured him that this chicken was more kosher than the Rubin chicken. You see, there is a hierarchy of chicken in Israel ... with each one considered more kosher than the other. There is:

1. Rabbanut (Regular Israelis)
2. Rabbanut Mehardrin (Somewhat more stringent Religious Zionists.)
3. Rabbanut Mehardin Verner (Religious Zionist Chareidi)

4. Machpud (Sephardim)
5. Badatz Beit Yosef (for Chareidi Sephardim)
6. Rubin (Chareidi Ashkenazi)
7. Badatz (Ultra Chareidi Ashkenaz)

So, in Jerusalem, Israel there are seven different levels of kosher for a chicken. The one considered least kosher is the one certified by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, so you can imagine just how un-kosher it must be! And each level of kosher chicken is more expensive than the lower ones. And this is in the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Jerusalem which has one of the highest poverty levels in all of Israel. Now you tell me: is that not crazy? We're talking about a chicken!

And if you think it is crazy *there* it's just as crazy here in America! Do you know that Empire Chicken has not one, not two, but three different rabbinic certifications? One is the OU, one is the Star K and one is KAJ. And if you look on the Empire website, it has a section called "Frequently Asked Questions" and each one of these certifications is explained. The OU being the Orthodox Union ... the Star K being the Baltimore Vaad Hakashrus and KAJ being the Kehilat Adat Jeshurun – the German Orthodox community. Why do you need three certifications? Well, I guess to make sure it is very, very, very kosher! Or, what people today refer to as "*glatt kosher*." Amongst the "frequently asked questions" on the Empire website, one question is: What is a "*glatt*" chicken? And the answer the website gives is: "Ask your rabbi." Why doesn't the website of Empire give the answer? You know why? Because, in America, *all* kosher chickens are "*glatt!*" That's right! All kosher chickens are "*glatt!*" Now, I know some of you will dismiss this statement because it comes from me ... and everyone knows I am not a "real" rabbi. But let me quote to you the words of another rabbi you know of.

"Sometimes suppliers or proprietors will advertise *glatt* kosher chickens to promote their product. This implies that the "*glatt*" chicken is of higher kosher quality than "regular" kosher chicken and that a chicken

could be kosher without being *glatt*. This is a myth, since *every* chicken in the U.S. must be *glatt* in order to be considered kosher.” Those are the exact written words of Rabbi Moshe Heinemann ... and everyone knows that he is a real rabbi! All chickens are *glatt* ... but we need to pay three supervising organizations to certify them as such!

I hope that Joe Biden’s daughter and Donald Trump’s daughter and Paul McCartney and several others don’t hear about this. And that brings us to what, in some ways, is the nicest story of the year. There is nothing good about the high rate of intermarriage taking place amongst our people. But at the same time one cannot help but note, as Rabbi Stewart Weiss did in an article in the Jerusalem Post, of how many “prominent Gentiles are emulating us and even choosing Jews as their life partners.” The most recent was Vice President Joe Biden’s daughter, Ashley, who is engaged to a nice Jewish doctor from Philadelphia. Biden’s son, Beau, is married to a nice Jewish girl from New York ... so all of the Vice President of the United States *machatonim* are Jewish, and so are the *machatonim* of our Secretary of State and past President, Hillary and Bill Clinton. Paul McCartney, one of the world’s most popular singer-songwriters, decided to marry Nancy Shevel – a nice Jewish woman, which means that two out of the three women to whom Paul McCartney has been married are Jews. Then there were the newspaper pictures of Jared and Ivanka, daughter of Donald Trump, who converted to Judaism and keeps a kosher home. The newspaper picture showed Jared and Ivanka pushing their baby in a carriage with a lulav and esrog sticking out. British newspapers commented how nice it was that Jared had bought Ivanka flowers ... but we knew better!

And as a New Year begins, we should know that in a country where not too many years ago there were signs “No Jews or Dogs Allowed,” we Jews have become so accepted – sometimes to our own detriment – that we ought to start looking within and seeing what is it that others find so beautiful in our tradition that we might be missing. And believe me when I tell you, it has nothing to do with three

certifications on a *glatt* kosher chicken! There is more to Judaism than that. Let's search it out in the coming year.

So these are the three stories I wanted to reflect on before we move on in this New Year. They are three wonderful stories. And if we learn from them – you don't have to strip search old ladies to be secure ... you don't need three certifications to make something kosher ... but you do need to see the beauty in Judaism that others see – then maybe, just maybe this New Year will truly be for all of us a “*gut yahr*” and a “*gezunt yahr*.”

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