

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's Torah portion "Bo", Hashem commands us regarding Tefillin. As the verse states "And it shall be for you a sign on your arm and a reminder between your eyes - so that Hashem's Torah may be in your mouth - for with a strong hand Hashem removed you from Egypt." (Shemos 13:9) The Talmud teaches us that "Man always needs a sign of his bond with Hashem. Shabbos itself is such a sign, but on weekdays, the sign is Tefillin." (The Aryeh Kaplan Anthology, "Tefillin," Rav Aryeh Kaplan, citing Erubin 96a)

Every mitzvah serves to draw us closer to G-d and strengthen the bond of love between Hashem and his people. In fact, the word Mitzvah comes from a root meaning "to bind." (Ibid.) In the case of Tefillin, this bond is physical as well as spiritual. (Ibid.) So by putting on Tefillin, we literally bind G-d's love symbol to our bodies. (Ibid.) The following story illustrates the power of Tefillin to bind a Jew to his Maker.

In the summer of 2000, 16-year-old Mordechai Kaler volunteered to help in the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Greater Washington. One of his responsibilities was to invite the residents to attend the daily services in the synagogue on the first floor. Some agreed and others refused, but even those who declined were pleasant about it.

However, there was one man, Mr. Klein (not his real name) on the second floor, however, who had been quite nasty and had even cursed another volunteer when he was asked to join the minyan. The volunteer was taken aback by the Mr. Klein's tirade, so Mordechai undertook the challenge of speaking to the angry gentleman.

One day soon after, Mordechai found Mr. Klein sitting in a wheelchair in a lounge filled with residents of the home. After introducing himself, Mordechai said softly but firmly, "If you don't wish to join the services we can respect that, but why should you curse the volunteer? He is here to help and he was just doing his job."

"Young man," the elderly gentleman said sternly, "Wheel me to my room. I want to tell you a story." When they were in the room alone, the old man told his story of horror, pain and sadness. He came from a prominent religious family in Poland and when he was 12 years old, he and his family were taken to a concentration camp. His whole family was killed except for him and his father.

In their barracks on the concentration camp there was a man who had smuggled in the tefillin shel rosh, the tefillin worn on the head. Every day the men in the barracks would try to seize an opportunity to put on that tefillah (the single form of tefillin), even for a moment, when there were no German S.S. guards nearby. The men knew that they hadn't fulfilled the mitzvah of donning tefillin shel yad, but their love for mitzvos compelled them to do whatever they could.

Mr. Klein continued telling his story, "But for my father that wasn't enough. My bar mitzvah was coming up and he wanted that at least on the day of my bar mitzvah I wear a complete set of tefillin. He had heard that in a barracks down the road, a man who had been killed had had a complete pair of tefillin. On the morning of my bar mitzvah, my father, at great risk, went out early to the other barracks to get the tefillin. I was waiting nervously by the window. In the distance I could see him rushing to get back. As he came closer I could see that he was carrying something cupped in his hands. "As he got to the barracks, a German stepped out from behind a tree and shot and killed him right before my eyes! When the German left I ran out and took the pouch of tefillin that lay on the ground next to my father. I managed to hide it." The old man peered angrily at Mordechai and said vehemently, "How can anyone pray to a G-d Who would kill a boy's father right in front of him? I can't!"

Mr. Klein pointed to the dresser against the wall and said, "Open the top drawer." In the drawer Mordechai saw an old black tefillin pouch, crusted from many years of not being used. "Bring me the pouch," Mr. Klein ordered. Mordechai complied.

Mr. Klein opened it and took out an old pair of tefillin. "This is what my father was carrying on that fateful day. I keep it to show people what my father died for, these black boxes and straps. These were the last things I got from my father." Mordechai was stunned. He had no words-no comfort to give. He could only pity the poor man who had lived his life in anger, bitterness and sadness. "I'm sorry," he finally stammered softly. "I didn't realize." Mordechai left the room resolved never to come back to Mr. Klein again. When Mordechai came home that evening, he could not eat or sleep. Mordechai returned to the home the next day, but avoided Mr. Klein's room. A few days later, as Mordechai was helping the men who had come to the shul, one of them said, "I have yohrzeit today and I need to day Kaddish. We only have nine men here today. You think you could get a tenth man?" Mordechai had already made his rounds that morning and had been refused by many of the residents. They were too tired, not interested or half asleep. The only one he hadn't approached was the old man Mr. Klein on the second floor. Reluctantly and hesitantly Mordechai went upstairs. He knew Mr. Klein would scold him, but he still had to make an effort. He knocked on the door gently and announced himself. "It's you again?" the old man asked "I'm so sorry to trouble you," Mordechai said softly, "but there's a man in shul who needs to say Kaddish today. We need you for a minyan. Would you mind coming just this one time?" The old man looked up at Mordechai and said, "If I come this time, then you'll leave me alone?"

Mordechai wasn't expecting that response. "Yes," he said in a whisper, "I won't bother you again." "Would you like to bring your tefillin?" added Mordechai after gathering up his courage. Mordechai braced himself for a bitter retort - but instead the man said again, "If I bring them, will you leave me alone?" "Yes," Mordechai said, "I will leave you alone." "All right," Mr. Klein replied, "then wheel me downstairs and make sure that I'm in the back of the shul, so I can get out first."

Mordechai wheeled the old man to the shul and brought him to the back. "May I help you?" Mordechai asked as he took the tefillin out of the pouch. The gentleman put out his left hand. Mordechai helped him put on his tefillin and left the synagogue to do other work.

After the davening (prayers), Mordechai returned and the shul was empty - except for Mr. Klein. He was still wearing his tefillin and tears were running down his cheeks. "Shall I get a doctor or a nurse?" Mordechai asked. Mr. Klein didn't answer. Instead he was staring down at the straps of tefillin wrapped on his left arm, caressing them with his right hand and repeating over and over, "Tatte, Tatte (Father, Father), it feels so right." The old man looked up at Mordechai and said, "For the last half hour I've felt so connected to my Tatte. I feel as though he has come back to me." Mordechai took Mr. Klein back to his room and as he was about to leave, the old man said, "Please come back for me tomorrow." And so every morning Mordechai would go to the second floor and the old man would be waiting for him at the elevator, holding his tefillin.

Mordechai would wheel him into the shul where he would sit in the back wearing his tefillin holding a siddur, absorbed in his thoughts. One morning Mordechai got off the elevator on the second floor but Mr. Klein wasn't there. He hurried to his room, but his bed was empty. Instinctively he became afraid. He ran to the nurses' station and asked where the gentleman was - and they told him. He had been rushed to the hospital the previous afternoon and late in the day he had had a stroke and died. A few days later, Mordechai was given an award by the Jewish home for his work as a volunteer. After the ceremonies a woman approached him and thanked him for all he had done for her. Mordechai had no recollection of the woman. "Excuse me," Mordechai said, "do I know you?" "I am the daughter of that man you helped," she said softly. "He was my father and you did so much for him. You made his last days so meaningful. When he was in the hospital those final hours of his life, he called me frantically and asked me to bring him his tefillin. He wanted to daven one more time with them. I helped him with his tefillin in the hospital and then he had his stroke. He died wearing them. Bound to his Father - in Heaven. (Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn, Reflections of The Maggid) Every Jewish male 13 years and over is commanded to put on Tefillin. If you are already performing this mitzvah, then let this inspire you to fulfill the mitzvah with more intent. If you are not putting on Tefillin, then this should inspire you to find out what you are missing. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda "Anyone who brings merit to the masses, no wrongdoing will come into his hands."

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