

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 Eruvin 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.

During the massive wave of Russian immigration to Eretz Yisroel, many moving stories of the Jewish spirit reawakening in the spiritual wastelands of Russia were brought to light. The most remarkable of all the stories we have heard is about Pavel Koldyave, of Voronezh, a village about 14 hours outside Moscow.

The area where Pavel lived, was outside the so-called Pale of Settlement, where until 1917, Jews were forbidden to live. Those few who did manage to run the blockade lived outside the Pale in areas devoid of Jewish content and tradition.

A chance encounter with a book about Jewish history awoken the young man's curiosity, and an instinct about his Jewish roots gave him no rest. He sought to learn all he could about his religion, but there was no one in his city who could guide him on his path. So Pavel began to gather scattered crumbs of knowledge about Yiddishkeit.

A drawing of a religious Jew with a kippa on his head and tzitzis dangling from his garments, inspired Pavel to make a yarmulke and fashion strips of knotted fringes for the corners of his clothes. He found a mention in Dostoyevski about a Jewish prison who wore small black cubes (containing passages from Bible) on his head and arm. Pavel therefore took a leather bag from his mother, forming it into two cubes. He copied passages from his Russian translation of the Bible onto parchment paper and placed them into these cubes. Every morning before heading to work, he placed one on his forehead and the other on his wrist - as a watch!

We managed to procure a picture of Pavel with his tefillin!



Eventually, Boruch Hashem, Pavel made his way to Eretz Yisroel, where he now wears real tefillin! (from CompuTorah, Dr. Moshe Katz)

The Sages tell us that Hashem, as it were, wears tefillin. The Gemara then asks, what is written in Hashem's tefillin? The Gemara answers with verse in Tanach: "And who is like Your people Yisroel, a unique nation on earth, whom Hashem went forth to redeem unto Himself for a people..." (Divrei HaYamin I, 17,21) Jews wear tefillin which praise Hashem, while Hashem as it were, wears tefillin which praise the Jewish Nation. Tefillin therefore demonstrate the love between us and Hashem.

How many of us have tefillin in the closet and never put them on? How many of us do put tefillin on every day but do it without feeling! Let us be inspired by Pavel to fulfill the mitzvah of tefillin properly. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**