



Wrapping

in the Mountains

Leizer Raksin

My father a"h was never one to want to be a burden on others. Even the way he passed away was considerate: We only sat shiva for a few hours because Yom Tov cut the customary week of shiva short, and once shiva is cut short we do not resume after Yom Tov.

Rather than being a burden, my father tried to help and watch out for us in any way he could. I have a strong feeling he is doing that now more than ever before, especially after an incident that happened to me on the highway last week. But first I have to give you some background on why I was traveling on that highway to begin with.

Working upstate during the summer, I of course made it my business to find a shul where I could fulfill my obligations to my father (daven for the omed, say kaddish). My family and I were staying in Monticello, and my job was in an adjacent town, so I was very dependent on my car. Well, one fine morning my car developed a leak in the heater core. I was stuck in Monticello, unable to get to work, with no water in the car. I managed to get to the repair shop about a mile down the road, and the mechanic on duty assured me it would be done that day.

Well you know how those things go... the car didn't start... I neglected to tell him there was an anti-theft device installed, and you had to know where the secret switch was... the end was that I didn't get my car back that night. I tried to say "gam zu letova" (this too is for the good) but it wasn't easy, as I was left using taxis (waste of time and waste of money) until after davening the next morning. But I soon saw why this was, indeed, for the good. After davening, I took one last taxi to the repair shop, and, holding my tallis and tefillin bag in my hand, entered the shop.

The mechanic was standing there, I was standing there, and the tefillin bag was right there in plain sight. It was just begging me to use it for another Jew! Of course! I asked him if he would like to put on tefillin. No argument at all. Very pleasantly, he replied, "Why not? It's been years since I've put on tefillin."

The mechanic's accountant "just happened" (there is no such thing as coincidence) to emerge from the back office at this point, and, after ascertaining that he too was Jewish, I asked him if he would like to put on tefillin. Again, the answer came, "Why not?"

Now I was on a roll! An elderly gentleman from Florida stopped by to pick up his car just then, and I asked him if he would like to put on tefillin. He replied that it was twenty years since he had put on tefillin. "Well, isn't it about time, then?" I asked. He agreed.

This would already be good enough to write an article in *The N'shei Chabad Newsletter* about. I saw so clearly why my car had broken down and why it couldn't be ready on time. But it didn't end there. The mechanic asked me if I would stop by every morning on my way to work and put on tefillin with him, and with his accountant, too. Of course I happily agreed to this plan, but the accountant wasn't interested in putting on every day - a couple times a week was as much as he would commit to. Okay. I knew I couldn't be too pushy or I'd lose him altogether. Another man came in and I asked him to join in putting on tefillin but he categorically refused. As a matter of fact, the way he put it was, "I haven't put on tefillin in 35 years, and I won't be doing it for the next 35, either." I was very upset by his attitude; his stubbornness only served to galvanize me further on my campaign...

My experience at the repair shop that morning lit a fire under me. I suddenly felt the urge to really put some energy into putting on tefillin with my fellow Jews. There are so many Jews living and working in the little town where I worked this past summer. I wanted to get to them with my tefillin bag.

Straight from shul the next day, the mechanic was my first stop. Then I went on to the town where I work. At the first place I went into, I was received very warmly. Then I asked the two questions: When was the last time you put on Tefillin? How often may I come back? At this place, the wife of the owner (I'll call her Debbie) said, "Every day would be fine. And here are the addresses of some of my relatives. They could use it, too."

Every day at that place, the owner would put on tefillin happily. But the son-in-law who also worked there, now he was a tough nut to crack. He wouldn't refuse outright, just say he was busy. Not today. Finally I had no choice. I complained to Debbie! Five minutes later he came out of his office with a big smile. "Okay, I'm ready to put on tefillin. I'm not starting up with my Shviger!" (Who says tefillin is not a woman's mitzvah?)

Debbie's next lead was her brother. He worked nearby, so she called him on the



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phone and said, "Come quickly; there's someone here to put tefillin on you." In five minutes he was standing in front of me, and he said (similar to what the son-in-law had said), "I respect my sister. If she tells me to do something, I do it." He told me where his business was and agreed that I could come every day.

One day I walked in to Debbie's brother's workplace, and there were five men standing there. I felt like I had walked into a gold mine! I asked, "Who is Jewish here?" One man replied, "Ich bin der goy." Everybody laughed. Everybody was Jewish! I just knew Hashem had planted them all there at that moment for me and my campaign, so I laid down the law. "Nobody leaves here til you've all put on tefillin." The stories came in... one man hadn't put on in forty years; one hadn't put on in thirty years.

Slowly but surely I started building up a route. It took about an hour and a half per day.

One day I went to a new place, an address that Debbie had given me. She had instructed me to say, "Debbie sent me." I was let in right away, and the manager welcomed me warmly. I said, "Debbie sent me here to talk with you about putting on tefillin." He sat quietly for a few seconds, then replied, "Just two days ago I decided to look into my Judaism. I dug up my grandfather's old tefillin, which are a hundred years old, and took them to the local shul. I tried to use the tefillin, but they are so old the straps cracked. I decided that I really have to get my own pair. But I didn't do anything about it yet."

I told him I would help him get a brand new pair, but in the meantime, I would be happy to come every day and let him use mine.

There was one very important and respected businessman in town who said he would put on tefillin, but he was really very busy and harried, and never even knew ahead of time if he would be in the office at the same time every day. I assured him that he was under no obligation (not to me, anyway-with Hashem is another matter), and I would stop in every day anyway. If he was in, fine, if not I would leave with no hard feelings. He agreed. The next day I came and he was busy. The day after that I came and he wasn't there. I left a message that I was there and would try again the next day. Later that same day, he showed up at my workplace and apologized to me. He humbly asked me if I had time now to put on tefillin. I answered that no matter how busy I was, I would always find time to put on tefillin with a fellow Jew. We are now friends.

One time in his office, he directed me to another office nearby and said that if I went there, I would pick up two new customers for sure. I did. Two more on my route. If someone "happened" to be in their office, they would ask the guest to put on tefillin too. There was no escaping me!

I had some people who only wanted me to come once a week. So I did.

One day I was walking down the street with a friend, who suddenly turned to me and said, "See that guy in jeans

and a t-shirt across the street?" I took a look-no yarmulke, no sign of being Jewish. "How do you know he's Jewish?" I asked. "He looks Israeli. Definitely." So I called out to him in Hebrew. He answered immediately, and I acquired a new regular customer.

One day I was walking out of the post office when I bumped into our tefillin poster lady, Debbie. She pointed to a business down the block. "Have you been in there yet?" she asked. I hadn't. "Come on, I'll introduce you to the owner." He became a regular customer.

On good days I put on tefillin with as many as eighteen people. All this can be crammed into an hour and a half *before* going to work. Mivtza Tefillin is not only for fulltime mivtzoim people, or fulltime shluchim. It is for people with jobs!

I built up a reputation for being on time. I made it my business to come to every business at the same time every day. (If your son has ever been on my school bus route, you know I mean it!)

Once I walked into a business and met a Jewish teenage boy who had obviously wandered off the path. When I asked him if he wanted to put on tefillin, his boss motioned to me as if to say, "How I wish you could get him to put on tefillin." At first the kid refused but I kept asking and eventually he relented.

One time the boy told me that on a Sunday (when I didn't come, since most businesses are closed), he had asked his boss, "Where's the guy with the tefillin today?" The boss called me telling me that the boy was asking for me. I explained that I don't come Sundays. He asked if I could pass by. I asked him why *he* couldn't put tefillin on with the boy? The man had replied, "Nah, not me... that's a Lubavitcher thing." I came right over. Then one morning out of the blue the boy says to me, "Listen, you can stop coming here, okay?" I was shocked. Had I offended him in some way, or had he decided he didn't want to put on tefillin anymore, G-d forbid? No. It's just that after putting on tefillin a whole week, the boy had felt funny skipping it on Sundays. So he had found his tefillin from his Bar Mitzvah, and had started using them every day, by himself. He didn't need me to come every day, but I tried to stay in touch occasionally anyway. I recently found out that the boy has become frum again. Boruch Hashem.

I once needed a tenth man for mincha so I could say kaddish for my father. I went next door to my workplace and looked around for Jews to join. A fellow who was sitting with his Puerto Rican girlfriend, r"l volunteered, "If you need a tenth, I guess maybe I..." I was shocked. I didn't think he was Jewish. But he was indeed. "Who are you?" I asked, curious. He said that he used to work in the Bronx, and occasionally a Mivtza tank would stop by and he would go inside and put on tefillin. I asked him if he would please put on tefillin right now, before mincha! He said no, he was busy with his girlfriend now. The girlfriend protested, "No, go ahead, do what you have to do for your religion. I'll be

happy to wait for you." Imagine, a Puerto Rican girl with a heavy Spanish accent telling a Jewish boy to go put on tefillin.

The summer was coming to a close, and I started getting jokes from my customers: "Great, only two more days for you to come bothering me!" I knew I had to do something, and fast. I bought three pairs of tefillin. I gave them to customers who promised to try to use them every weekday.

Then I asked the other people: If I travel upstate once a week, will you make it worth my trip? Will you put on tefillin? Debbie's son-in-law agreed that if I made the trip, he would not be too busy for me. I made a decision to travel upstate once a week. (See box for more on this.)

The Satan just can't stand it when the good side is winning. He does whatever he can to try and ruin it. So of course my first time to travel upstate was September 11. Roads were closed and it took me nearly six hours to get back home. But the Satan lost that one. I was not dissuaded. The next week I went right back.

On Erev Rosh Hashona, I was upstate putting on tefillin with my original customer, the mechanic. There was a customer standing there waiting for his car to be fixed, a Jewish man, but he refused to put on tefillin. I tried all of my usual lines but nothing worked. As I was getting into my car

to leave, I heard him ask the mechanic how much he owed him for fixing his car. The mechanic replied, "It's a hundred dollars." This was an answer that the customer didn't like. "What, so much money?" He was shocked and upset. I got out of my car and said, "If I pay for the repair, will you put on tefillin?" Quickly, the man said, "Yes!" I opened my wallet to take out a hundred bucks. The customer stopped me saying, "Oh, come on, you've got to be joking." But I was dead serious and I took the money out of my wallet. He put on tefillin and took the money. As I left, he said, "I do not need your money. But it's the principle of the thing: you offered me a deal, I took it. I want you to know that I will give the whole hundred dollars to charity today."

I found out, to my amazement and great happiness, that some of my weekly customers actually walk over to some of the men I bought tefillin for, and use their tefillin between my visits.

So what does all this have to do with my father? One day I was in my car, on my way upstate. It was Yud Tisrev, 6:00 in the morning, and pitch dark outside. I was on Route 17. There was not a car on the road except for me, the way to put on tefillin with Yidden.

I was thinking about my father and feeling that he was watching me and hoping he was pleased with what I was

WHAT IS SO IMPORTANT ABOUT TEFILLIN?

Eretz Yisroel is at war. Terrorists attack on a daily basis. Every Jew is now a soldier, like it or not. What is our ammunition? Mivtza Tefillin.

Shortly before the Yom Kippur War, the Rebbe initiated an unprecedented tefillin Campaign. He explained that tefillin has a protective effect on Jews and Eretz Yisroel. The Torah says that when all the nations of the world will see that you are called by Hashem's name (meaning that you put on tefillin), they will fear you.

Putting on tefillin with Yidden is so crucially important to Jewish survival, simply in a physical sense, that sometimes it cancels out the obligation to do other mitzvos! I personally experienced this. Let me tell you what happened.

A Jewish man entered my store one afternoon during the summer, in the Catskills. I talked with him and when I found out that there were a lot of Jews in his workplace, I offered to deliver his purchases, in the hope that I could put on tefillin with the other Jews there. When I arrived, I immediately began asking who is Jewish. Everything was going along swimmingly when the owner (I'll call him "Jake") walked in. I introduced myself, shook his hand, and explained what I was doing. He responded with a firm NO. "There's a time and a place for everything, and this is neither the time nor the place for this."

I asked Jake if I could return at a later time and discuss it further with him. He agreed. A week later, I got up the nerve to approach him and we went into his

office to talk. Boy, did I get it over the head! "You don't have to start explaining to me how important tefillin is. If you want to put on tefillin you can just go somewhere else and do it!" And he had some very succinct suggestions on exactly where that place was. And he finished with, "And don't ever come back here to solicit customers for your tefillin!"

I thought it was all over, tefillin-wise, for Jake and the people in his workplace. I was wrong. Several weeks later, I found out that Jake would be at a certain minyan (because of a mutual acquaintance of ours who was saying kaddish and trying to get a minyan together, and Jake had agreed to join). I decided to try coming to that minyan. I thought that maybe, just maybe, if Jake saw me putting on tefillin with peo-

doing. The Rebbe so often said that when children follow in the good ways of their parents, they keep their parents alive. I was thinking these thoughts as I drove along at sixty miles per hour when I saw something in the distance. Well, at sixty miles per hour, the distance disappears very quickly. In seconds I was upon them: three enormous deer, standing right smack in middle of the road, just having a little farbrengen on Route 17.

Now if you've ever been in a car accident involving deer, you know that as gentle and nonviolent as these animals are, they can weigh about a thousand pounds and people are often injured or even killed chas v'sholom, and cars are totaled. I slammed on the brakes and swerved, desperately trying to avoid them. With a great screeching of brakes and squealing of wheels, I avoided them and only BRUSHED something on the side of the road! Filled with relief, I got out of the car. The deer scampered off. I was perfectly fine, and my car had a minimal bit of damage (and you know where I was heading, anyway!). I was able to continue driving with no problem. It certainly could have been terrible, but Boruch Hashem it was not.

I felt strongly that my father was looking out for me. I ask my father to please continue to look out for me and for all of us and for Klal Yisroel, to ask Hashem to send Moshiach, and in return, I will continue to work on Mivtza Tefillin, and encourage others to do the same.

Thank you, Dad.



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ple at that minyan, his heart would be softened.

But I had a dilemma. If I did that, I would not be able to say kaddish myself! And I was within the year after my father's passing! But here was a real chance of making inroads in Mivtza Tefillin. So I consulted Rabbanim.

The first Rav said that tefillin is from the Torah and kaddish is from the Rabbanim, so naturally tefillin comes first. Skip your kaddish and go for the tefillin.

The second Rav told me that many years ago some rabbi had faced a similar dilemma, and had written to the Rebbe asking what to do. The Rebbe had replied, "Why do you think that your saying kaddish is more important than another Yid putting on Tefillin?"

Furthermore, added the Rav, you have brothers who are saying

kaddish for your father. And if you didn't, you could pay someone to do it for you. I had my answer."

I set off, confident that I was doing the right thing, but anxious, since after all Jake had practically thrown me out of his office the last time I saw him.

I put on tefillin with people, and then asked someone else to please go over to Jake and ask him if he wanted to put on tefillin. The answer came back: Why not? Then someone else told Jake that I travel in from Brooklyn every week just to put on tefillin with people in this town. He responded with admiration... and offered to pay for my gas as a way to participate in the mitzvah! (You can imagine how shocked I was. I tried to control my facial expressions.)

Now Jake had a question for me. "What can I do to help you?"

Simple. Just let me come and do my thing at your place every week. He agreed. I gave up my kaddish and look what I got.

Dear Reader, I am writing this to you. I am hoping that you, man or woman, it doesn't matter (as you see from Debbie), will take upon yourself to fight for Eretz Yisroel, for the safety and survival of Yidden everywhere. When you spot a Yid who doesn't put on tefillin, please make it your business to approach him. Tell him that out of every 24 hours that G-d gives you, take out two minutes to thank Him and recognize Him, by putting on tefillin. Don't be afraid of rejection. Don't be afraid of getting yelled at and thrown out of places. Eventually everybody comes around!