



Wrapping It Up...

This is the third in a series of articles by Lazer Raksin about his work in Mivtza Tefillin. (The series will come to an end IYH with the coming of Moshiach, the ultimate goal of Lazer's Mivtza Tefillin.) The first installment was published in the N'shei Chabad Newsletter Nissan, 5762; the second was in Tishrei, 5763. For copies of his previous articles, you may email him at "fliegel" <vze23jdw@verizon.net. Now Lazer is back by popular demand.

It has been a while since I wrote my last article. I figured I'd give you people some time to chew over what I wrote. I was hoping you would go out there with a shturm and get busy helping Yidden to put on tefillin, mezuzos, etc. And I am very gratified that so many of you have done so, whether in response to my articles or not, what's the difference as long as you do it, and continue to do so, Boruch Hashem. But seeing that Moshiach has not arrived yet, I figured I would write again, hoping that you out there who are still not reaching out to other Jews will start now, and make a difference.

This past summer, I just kept going to people to put on tefillin, and I kept on approaching people wherever I would meet them. During the winter, as you know, I travel to "my" people in the Catskills every Tuesday morning. (I thank the family that, thanks to reading my first article in the N'shei Chabad Newsletter, gives me their car every Tuesday for me to make the trip, gas and tolls included.) I was always afraid that one fine morning the men would just get tired of the whole thing and say, "That's it, I've had enough!" But B"H with the Rebbe's brocha, I never have encountered such a thing. I hope and pray that I never do.

One of my regular businesses, where I come with tefillin, has an Israeli boss. He puts on tefillin whenever I come. He has three Christian ladies working for him. (Yes, he's the same Israeli from my previous article. Good for you that you remember.) Now one of the Christian ladies just had

to understand what I do with her boss. She asked question after question. Finally, she said she understood. And she approved. She thought it was a good idea, bringing the religion to the people, instead of waiting until they come to the place where religion is formally dispensed.

One day she told me, "Lazer, I have a customer for you. My boyfriend, he's Jewish." (Well, that explains her deep interest in Jewish practices.) She told her boyfriend that when he comes to visit her, and I happen to be there, he has to do the same thing that her boss does. G-d helped and it happened; we met. I walked in and there was the boyfriend. He was willing to accommodate his girlfriend's wishes, but his question was, what exactly *is that thing*? He had never put on tefillin in his life, never been to Hebrew school, let alone a shul of any sort. I explained what we were doing, and he was happy about it. Imagine, we had a Bar Mitzvah for a man who was 43 years old. I understand that I rack up big points with somebody like that, who had never put on tefillin until that day. With Hashem's help I managed to bump into him visiting his girlfriend at work a second time, too!

An elderly gentleman from Florida, a Holocaust survivor, came into my pizza shop, requesting two pies. I told him the price and he complained, "Vhy so expensive? I could buy non-kosher pizza for a lot less." So I explained to him that kosher cheese costs more, plus being

kosher brings additional expenses all down the line. He told me that he really doesn't care whether he buys kosher pizza or treife pizza but he has guests in his house now who insist on eating only kosher. "Can I get a discount?" was his next question. I said yes, if he would buy ten or more pies. That's my policy. But he only needed two. So we left it at that.

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Now normally I don't bother my customers about tefillin, when we're doing business. But somehow this elderly gentleman caught my attention, with his assurance that he didn't care about kashrus. So I asked him if he would like to put on tefillin. He told me he was in a rush and had no time, as people were waiting at home to eat. I explained to him it would take only two minutes. No, he insisted, "I'm in a rush." So I said to my Israeli worker in Hebrew, "Tell him the pizza will be ready in five minutes." The elderly gentleman looked to me hard and said in perfect Hebrew, "I heard what you said to him, and I still don't have time." Now he got me going. Somehow I knew I had to get him to put on tefillin no matter what it took. We were in a battle of wits. So I said to him in a Yiddish-accented English, "You vere looking for a discount, I'll give you five dollars off the two pies if you put on tefillin."

Now I saw his eyes light up. I saw we were going to negotiate. All excited, he asked incredulously, "Five dollars off, for putting on tefillin?! Tefillin means nothing to me!" So I answered him, "Five dollars means nothing to me also. But it means a lot to you, and tefillin means a lot to me. So we have a perfect trade. You get the thing that means a lot to you, but nothing to me, and I get the thing that means a lot to me, but nothing to you." So we went to the kitchen and he put on tefillin, and of course he read it perfectly, and commented casually that it had been decades since he last put on tefillin. I gave him his five dollar discount and we said our good-byes very happily on both sides.

One time I was at the mechanic, and an alteh yiddel in his nineties happened to be there. I got to talking with him, as Mivtza Tefillin is not for the shy and unfriendly, and soon enough asked if he would like to put on tefillin. He told me a story. About eighty years earlier, when he was about twelve years old or so, in cheder, his rebbe slapped him, unfairly, according to his perception of the event. He doesn't remember why he got slapped, but he remembers that he

was so angry at the injustice of it that he hit back his rebbe. For this he was thrown out of cheder. In those days, in Europe, once you were thrown out, you were out permanently. He was never allowed back into cheder. The indignity and humiliation that he suffered are hard for us to imagine. As soon as he had his Bar Mitzvah, he vowed to have nothing more to do with Yiddishkeit ever again. His entire life since then had been not frum.

I asked him, "Isn't it time to come back to Hashem, now that you're older?" He replied with a twinkle in his eye that at his age, he's closer to Hashem than ever before. "I've got one foot in the other world already," he informed me gaily. "You think you can put on tefillin just once before you go?" I asked. "No," he replied with a smile, "I'm an akshen. But I think you're doing wonderful work. Carry on."

I have to admit I lost that round. At least as far as I know.

I was about to leave a business that I visit regularly for Mivtza Tefillin, when I saw someone else also leaving. He said he was Jewish, but also that he's in a rush, he even had his coat on, and he was halfway out the door. I reasoned with him, what's just two minutes? It goes very quickly, I'm rather experienced, I argue. But you don't know how late I am, he tells me.

Now overhearing our conversation is his Christian co-worker, who's been with him over twenty years. She can't take it that he keeps refusing me. Finally she gets fed up, and in a very frustrated voice, she says to him, "Bob, you don't have two minutes to say your prayers?!" Getting angry, she continues, "Now imagine what dangers might be lurking, lying in wait for you on the highway, G-d forbid, and because you took out two minutes to say your prayer, you might be saved from who knows what!" I thought he would get angry at both of us, and I couldn't believe it when he stopped, thought over her words, and took

off his coat and jacket in order to put on tefillin. Imagine what's happening... Goyim are telling Yidden to see the larger picture, to see past the immediate moment, and to take out the two minutes to put on tefillin.

In the past year and a half more than ten of my people bought their own pairs of tefillin. Of course, I am very pleased and proud to say that they use them almost every day. My biggest nachas comes when my people tell me that when one of their Jewish friends happens to pass by, they get them to put on tefillin, too. The Rebbe trained me and I had the z'chus to train them, and now they are training their



friends. This is what the Rebbe always said, that if someone knows Alef and Bais, he should teach the one who only knows Alef. Every Jew can reach out to another Jew in some way. You don't have to be a Rosh Yeshiva or a principal of a high school or a radio personality. Each of us in his or her own life has many little encounters with Jews which should be taken advantage of to do the Rebbe's work.

I was once at the mechanic (sometimes I think G-d makes my car break down just so I'll meet more Yidden there), and while he was putting on tefillin, a friend of his came in and saw him with the tefillin on. The friend was shocked, he did a double take, and asked incredulously, pointing his finger at the mechanic, "You?!! YOU?! I can't believe you put on tefillin!" So I step in and answer, "Yep, every single day except for Shabbos." Then I offer the friend to put on tefillin, but he refuses, with the time-honored excuse, I really have no time. I told him if he ever found the two minutes, he could always go to the mechanic, as he has his own pair, and is always willing to share them with a fellow Jew.

Then the friend asked the mechanic, "But WHY do you do it?" The whole room grew quiet. Everyone there wanted to know the answer to this question. I was also curious to hear what he would answer. With a little smile, the mechanic responded, "You know how it is when you do

something, and everything works out fine, you're just afraid to stop!"

Hopefully all of you readers of the N'shei Chabad Newsletter (and I know there are really a lot of you) got the message, that each and every one of us including myself can and must do more to bring Moshiach. And let us hope and pray that the extra good deed we have done, the going out of our way to get a Yid to do a mitzvah, was the one last deed needed to tip the scales, and to bring Moshiach. 🕊

If anybody would like to sponsor a pair of Tefillin (\$340), I would be happy to let them share in my z'chus. Please contact me for further information.

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