



# MITZVA TEFILLIN, ISRAELI STYLE

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## SHALOM!

My name is Lazer. Remember me? I used to drive the school bus for Oholei Torah for many years, and in the summers I worked upstate. And for many years I used to put *tefillin* on people in upstate New York, and I always wrote about my adventures in the *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* (2001-2004). I experienced many stories of *hashgachah pratis*, meeting people who barely identified as Jews and had never heard of *tefillin*. A few people even became *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos* as a result. Wherever I go, I try to convince people to put on *tefillin* and become closer to Hashem. I usually start with a joke or story to get their attention. *Baruch Hashem*, I've had a lot of success.

A year ago, we *baruch Hashem* fulfilled the dream of a lifetime and made *aliyah* to Eretz Yisroel. Eretz Yisroel also has Jews who need to put on *tefillin* and I've kept up the habit of helping them out. In a way *mitzva tefillin* is easier here—at least you can always find Jews—but in some ways it's more challenging. People feel that just by living there, they are Jewish enough. They don't need to express their Jewishness by putting on *tefillin*. I have my work cut out for me.

One day I was sitting on the stoop of my son-in-law's house. One of the other residents in his building came out to check his mailbox, which was empty. I asked him, "What were you expecting? Checks or bills?" Of course,

he told me he was hoping for checks. I told him, “Be thankful there are no bills. Checks come from Hashem. Bills come on their own. You don’t have to pray to Hashem to send you bills. But for checks, you have to pray to Hashem. Did you pray to Hashem today? Did you go to shul? Did you put on *tefillin*?”

“None of the above,” he told me.

“Don’t you think it’s time to thank Hashem for giving us life?”

“I don’t have to pray to him, I can just do good deeds.”

I saw that I’d have to try a different tack. I had just come back from the licensing division, where after several tries I had finally been granted an application for a commercial bus license. I was so thankful for this that I asked him to put on *tefillin* in honor of this. “Remember, you said you can do good deeds. This is your chance. I really want to give extra special thanks to Hashem today, and you can help me.” He saw I wasn’t going to give up and he agreed to put on *tefillin*. He mentioned to me that he was Yemenite and wanted to put on *tefillin* with a *tallis*. No problem. I went to my car, got my *tallis* and *tefillin* and the deed was done.



## ART OF THE DEAL

When we needed a car, we went to a dealer in Tverya. We agreed on a price, signed a contract and a week later we came back to pick up the car. When we arrived the salesman told

us that when calculating the price of the car, he had made a mistake of 600 shekel in our favor. He had given us too big of a discount. Now he wanted us to pay an additional 600 shekel. But we had already signed a contract at that price. A deal is a deal! I decided that rather than getting into an argument with this salesman, which could end up being a *chilul Hashem*, I’d make a deal with him. “Instead of fighting over it, if you agree to put on *tefillin* I’ll pay the extra money, no questions asked.”

The salesman knew that with a signed contract, there was no way he’d win this fight. He would have to make up the missing money out of his own pocket, so he readily agreed to the deal. Out came the *tefillin*, and two other salesman who were in the showroom followed suit.

As a rule, any Jewish man who walks into our house has to put on *tefillin*. When a worker came to put together our furniture, I asked him if he would like to put on *tefillin*. His response was, “Me? Put on *tefillin*? How can I put on *tefillin*? I never did it in my life. I am 65 years old, too old to start. My kids put on *tefillin*, but not me.” I explained to him that it is never too late to put on *tefillin*, no matter what age, and he finally agreed.

When we closed on the house the owner had no choice but to rejoice in our *simchah* by putting on *tefillin*. I asked the lawyer if he’d like to put on *tefillin* too. His response was, “Let’s just stick to business.” But later I had many stories through him, as you will see.

Once we ordered merchandise from a store called Ace in Israel. The manager told us that due to the size of our order, he would include

free shipping. However, since the shipping was free, we would have to wait until he had time to deliver it to us. After waiting two weeks, we got impatient and requested our merchandise. The manager told us he’d bring it at the end of the following week. I felt that we had waited long enough and wanted it immediately. We threatened to cancel our order, and he agreed to deliver it in two days. On thinking it over, I felt bad that I had to put pressure on him. So I went to the store, *tefillin* in hand, and told the manager, “You put on *tefillin* and I will wait patiently till the end of next week for the delivery.” The manager was shocked. *Tefillin* instead of rush delivery, what a deal. There was one catch. “What is *tefillin*?” he asked me. Now I was the one who was shocked. “Is your mother Jewish?” I asked. Yes, came the reply. A second *karkafta*<sup>1</sup>, in such a short time.



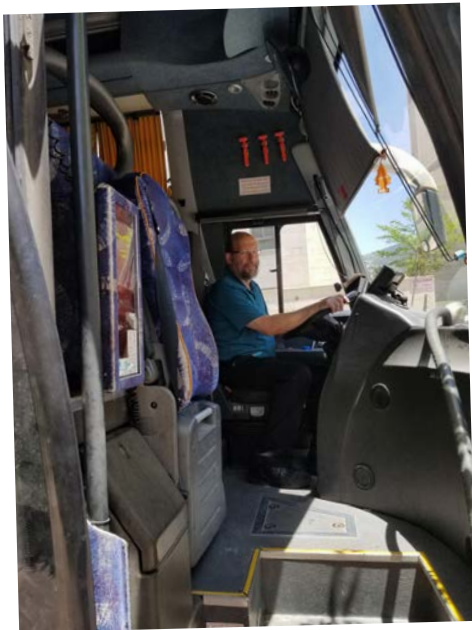
## TEFILLIN AND FALAFEL

Every morning on my way home from shul I pass a falafel shop. Sometimes we eat there during the week. One morning I stopped to compliment the store owner on his delicious falafel. “By the way, did you put on *tefillin* today?” The answer was no, so I put *tefillin* on with him. I mentioned that I pass by every day. Would he mind if I stopped by every morning and put on *tefillin* with him? He didn’t object; on the contrary, he was very pleased. There

<sup>1</sup> A *karkafta d’lo manach tefillin* is a man who has never put on *tefillin*. This spiritual lacking has serious implications in this World and the Next. Therefore, it is a big *z’chus* to help a Jew put on *tefillin* for the first time.



Lazer Raksin at work in Eretz Yisroel.



are two gentlemen who hang out every day in that falafel shop, but they refuse to put on *tefillin*. Every day I pester them, and when they see me coming they run away. I don't give up.

One day the falafel store owner told me to try the bakery next door. I did, and now I have another daily customer. Every day the bakery owner thanks me for coming and putting on *tefillin* with him.

One morning when I got there the owner of the falafel shop wasn't there. The worker explained that

he had left the store because he had just gotten the news that his mother had passed away. I found out where he lives, and every day of the week of *shivah* I came to be *menachem avel* with *tefillin* in hand. Everyone there also agreed to put on *tefillin* in the *zchus* of the *nifteres*.

Sometimes I don't know where I get the nerve to go to places and people that I don't even know and ask people to put on *tefillin*. But Hashem has His ways. One day, one of the gentlemen who hang out at the falafel store, one of those who run away when I come, asked the owner, "Why do you put on *tefillin* with him every day? What does it do for you?" He was expecting the owner to say that it does nothing for him. But he was left dumbstruck by the owner's response: "My wife is very happy that I put on *tefillin*

every day." I'm still hoping that I'll get both of those gentlemen.

One day at the falafel shop the owner saw somebody getting out of his car and coming towards the shop. He turned to me and said, "Let's see if you can get this guy. He's a tough one." I love a challenge! So I asked the gentleman if he would like to put on *tefillin*. Of course, his response was a big NO. I noticed everyone looking at me to see what I would do next. I asked him, "What's the problem? Why such a loud and definite NO?" He replied, "I just don't believe in it." The falafel owner said, "Do it for me." To my surprise, the "tough one" now said, "If the falafel store owner says that this is the right thing to do, I will do it."

Another time there was a gentleman standing at the falafel shop. I casually asked him to put on *tefillin*. He said, "I don't even know

# “YOU, YOU ARE PUTTING ON TEFILLIN? I CAN’T BELIEVE IT. I NEED TO TAKE A PICTURE OF THIS.”

what it is, let alone know what to do.” I asked him, “Do you know how to read Hebrew?” “Yes.” (This is Israel after all.) Another customer spoke up advising me to leave him alone. I told him, “You’ll be next if you don’t simmer down.” Getting back to my first customer, I helped him take off his coat and roll up his sleeve. On went the *tefillin*. I made the *brachah* with him and coached him through the *Shema*, but he stumbled over the words. It was obvious he had never *davened* in his life. I asked him if he had ever gone to synagogue. “Why should I? I’m a Christian.” Whoops! Maybe that was the reason the other customers were warning me not to bother with him. I don’t know what got into me, but I blurted out, “Your mother was Jewish.” He said, “And so was my grandmother!” His father was a Christian Arab married to a Jew, *r”L*. But he put on *tefillin* that day. My third *karkafta*.



## TEFILLIN IN THE LAWYER’S OFFICE

As I mentioned earlier, everyone who was involved in the purchase of my home put on *tefillin*. The lawyer initially refused but I was

determined. One day I popped into his office to pick up some papers. I told him straight out, “Listen, you have to put on *tefillin*, no excuses.” I think he just got tired of the argument. On went the *tefillin*. I was very proud of him. Before I left I half-jokingly asked him, “So, how often should I return to put *tefillin* on with you?” I appreciate one-timers but I really like committed repeat customers.

“Whenever you want,” he responded. I was tempted to say I’d come every day, but we settled on once a week.

One day when I came to put on *tefillin* with the lawyer, he told me he was busy and asked me to give him 40 minutes. I told him I’d wait outside and he should call me when he was ready. That became our usual practice. Once when I showed up at our regular time, he wasn’t there. I came back an hour later and he still wasn’t there. I asked the secretary to mention to him that I had been there twice. The next day he felt bad that I had come by twice, so he promised he would not make me wait any more if at all possible.

Once at the lawyer’s office there was a gentleman who was talking on his cell phone. As I was putting on *tefillin* with the lawyer, I asked the gentleman if he wanted to be next. As I expected, he gestured to me that he was busy talking on the phone and had no time. I asked

Hashem to please get him off the phone so I could put *tefillin* on him. After all, he hadn’t exactly refused. Suddenly, I heard him say to the person on the other end, “If you don’t believe me, call my friend and you will see that I’m right. Call me back in five minutes!” Well, since he was taking a five-minute break from the conversation, the timing was perfect. I started to put *tefillin* on with him. The lawyer looked at him in amazement and started pointing. “You, YOU are putting on *tefillin*? I can’t believe it. I need to take a picture of this. Nobody will believe me if I tell them that you just put on *tefillin*.” The man responded, “No picture, otherwise I’m taking off the *tefillin*.”

Later the lawyer told me that this man was the biggest atheist there is. “How you got him to put on tefillin is beyond me,” he said. I answered, “It is also beyond me.”

Another time at the lawyer’s office there was an Ashkenazi Rabbi sitting there. The lawyer asked the Rabbi permission to make him wait just a few minutes so he could put on *tefillin*. The Rabbi told him to go right ahead. The Rabbi asked me if Chabad had sent me to put on *tefillin* with people. I told him no, I do it out of my own free will and on my own time. He was very impressed.

Another time I asked the secretary if the lawyer was available. She told me he was in a meeting with five clients and had to rush out in one

hour. Try another time. I answered that I was willing to wait the hour but I didn't want him to be upset that he kept me waiting so long. I saw that his door was open, so I walked past his office. He noticed me and called out my name (exactly as planned). That was good enough for me to enter his office with all the people there. I said to him, "Quite a picnic you have in here." He apologized to me and said, "I have my hands full; I'll be with you in an hour." I turned to walk out but first called out, "Anyone here want to put on *tefillin*?"

One guy who was there with his wife and young child jumped up and said, "I want to!" On went the *tefillin*. After he was done I asked, "Anybody else?" There was no response so I started to leave. Then an elderly

gentleman stopped me and said he wanted to ask me a question. I thought his question would have something to do with *tefillin*. But he went into a tirade.

"Where do you get the nerve to barge into an office with five people sitting in a private meeting, and pester people with those *tefillin* of yours?" At first I had no response. I was about to apologize and tell him that he was right. I mean, it really was a big *chutzpah* of me to interrupt the meeting like that. But suddenly a thought crossed my mind. I said, "Let me try to explain why I did it. I have a warehouse filled with merchandise. My job is to go from store to store, from house to house, from office to office, to sell my wares. When I come upon a place where there are several people

together, it's like an unexpected windfall for me. I have a chance to get several customers in one shot. If I had to wait until the meeting was over, everyone would leave and I would miss the opportunity!" With that I walked out.

About a half hour later the meeting ended and the lawyer walked out. I put on *tefillin* with him and the lawyer apologized to me that the elderly gentleman had screamed at me in his office. Thank G-d the lawyer is now on my side!

Now when I come to the lawyer's office, the secretary calls him to let him know I'm there. Sometimes the lawyer tells her that he's in with clients. She answers him, "No problem, he'll put *tefillin* on everyone." ❧

## In the Rebbe's Words

**T**he *Gemara* (*Maseches Brachos*) says that the verse "And the nations of the world will see that G-d's name is called upon you and they will fear you" refers to the *tefillin shel rosh*. It is understood from this that when we activate this matter of "and they will fear you," not only will no lives be lost, but the enemy will be nullified immediately, so that there will be no need for war.

*(This sichah was delivered on Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar, 1967, two days before the outbreak of the Six-Day War. It is this sichah that launched Mivtza Tefillin, the first of the Rebbe's mitzvah campaigns.)*

**I**t was the approach of our Rebbeim not to wait for others to come to them, but ... when we see someone who is 'bare' of *mitzvos* we need to help them right away. Therefore, they created the system of going out

and spreading *Yiddishkeit*, and not convincing themselves that *ahavas Yisroel* does not apply to [those Jews]. (*Sichah of Shabbos Parshas Bereishis, 1968, responding to those who derided Mivtza Tefillin*).

**T**here is no need to be ashamed of this work, because we are doing Hashem's work and we are bringing them Moshiach, whose task is to gather in all the dispersed of Israel, including those in the category of *iver*

and *pise'ach*, blind and limping (*ibid*).

Some ask: "What benefit results from the *tefillin* campaign? You put *tefillin* on a Jew only one time, and you have no idea if it has any lasting effect on him." Every *mitzvah* forges an eternal bond between a Jew and his Creator. In addition, the *Gemara* teaches that a Jew who dons *tefillin* even once becomes worthy of his share in the World to Come; his entire eternal future depends on it (*Sichah of 10 Nissan, 5743*).