

# BALLOT WRESTLING, LING, TEFILLIN

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The *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* was fortunate to interview Seth (Shmuel Menachem Tzvi) Weissman, first in the backyard of the Silberberg home in West Bloomfield, MI, and then, to tie up loose ends, the week he turned 18, when he visited Crown Heights in Sivan/June of 2023. Here's what he told us:



Seth editing his own article at Rische's desk.  
Photo: Chaya Lipskier

## I'M AN ONLY CHILD.

My parents always brought me to Chabad. All my life we were members of the Bais Chabad Torah Center (BCTC) in West Bloomfield, MI. I vividly remember many Chabad events which shaped who I am today. The father-son learning every Motzoei Shabbos was very impactful; from the time I was four years old my father and I would learn stories and ideas from the *parshah* together. I also remember one Simchas Torah I was dancing on my father's shoulders during *Hakafos* when someone crashed into him, and I fell off. However, that didn't stop us! My father picked me up and we continued to dance after the fall! My mother wasn't too happy.

I have known Rabbi Shneur Silberberg, *shliach* in BCTC, from a very young age. I remember distinctly the Shabbos dinners at his house, eating delicious food and then playing with Legos while the adults did adult things. In my early teens, there would be a *tefillin*-and-waffles event where I would put on *tefillin*, *daven*, and then chow down on some waffles. More recently, Rabbi Shneur and I have been working together to spread the Rebbe's mission of igniting the sparks in Jewish *neshamos* through my public high school and community! But I'm jumping ahead...

I attended Akiva Hebrew Day

School until fourth grade. From fifth through eighth grades, I attended Hillel Day School. Even though this is a Jewish school, I was the only kid who kept Shabbos.

From there I went to West Bloomfield Public High School for four years.

I loved sports and excelled at football and wrestling.

Once again, as in my previous school, I was the only kid who kept Shabbos and had my own *tefillin*. At this point I wasn't sure of my identity. *Am I a Jew? Do I want to be one? Am I more of a wrestler, or more of a Jew? What's good about being Jewish anyway?*

In my sophomore year, there was a big regional wrestling tournament, to be held on Pesach. I didn't know if I should go or not. My parents left it up to me. A long time earlier, Rabbi Shneur had set me up with a *chavrusa*: Rabbi Binyomin Weiner, with whom I learned *Gemara Brachot* every week.

So I asked Rabbi Weiner what he thought I should do about this tournament. He replied, "Imagine how happy you can make G-d; imagine how the Heavens will smile down on you, if you resist this temptation!"

I didn't go.

This experience sparked something inside me.

I had given up something for G-d, and now I felt invested in the relationship.

I began to wear a *kippah* to school—a public high school. It was a public statement of my Jewish identity.



# I HAD GIVEN UP SOMETHING FOR G-D, AND NOW I FELT INVESTED IN THE RELATIONSHIP.

I began learning more, both with Rabbi Weiner and online with Chabad.org. In my learning I discovered the importance of *ahavat Yisrael* and connecting with other Jews.

In August, before my senior year, a crazy idea popped into my head. I thought, maybe I should start bringing *tefillin* to school. I mentioned it to Rabbi Y.Y. Mishulovin (*shliach* to Russian community in Michigan) and his face lit up. He said, “Absolutely! Go ahead!” At the time, I didn’t know about *mitzta’im* and the worldwide campaign—I just thought of it on my own.

And so, on September 15, 2022, I put on *tefillin* with another Jew for the first time (I know the date because I have the photo). After that, I began bringing my *tefillin* to school regularly and using them with the Jewish students, of which there were about 250, out of the approximately 1,800 students in the school.

Business was good! I felt a little awkward at first but that quickly evaporated. I was a wrestling star by now, really good at it, and success in sports opens doors for you. Nobody was going to mess with me. If anything, some kids felt intimidated by me because I was captain of the wrestling team *and* I was on the football team. So I did well with my *tefillin*; as an athlete I had a certain clout and this is how I used it. I got at least one customer per day. I knew who all the Jewish kids were in my high school.

There were twin boys, both with special needs, in high school. I gave them both a bar mitzvah (meaning this was their first time putting on *tefillin*).

There was one kid in my high school who used to put on *tefillin* with me almost every day. Then his grandfather passed away and nobody wanted his grandfather’s *tefillin*. His uncle sent them to him and now he puts them on every day.

Another kid in my high school was supposed to have his bar mitzvah during COVID, so the party was canceled. The Conservative rabbi never bothered to put on *tefillin* with this kid. (They think the main thing is the

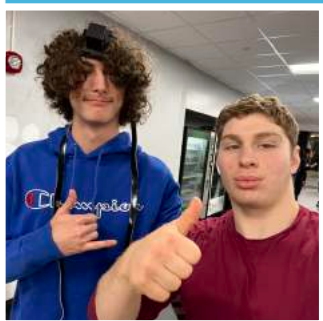
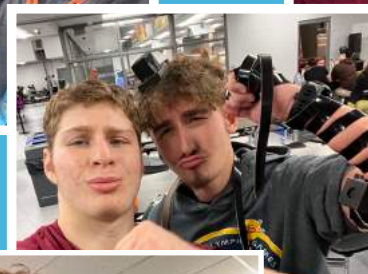
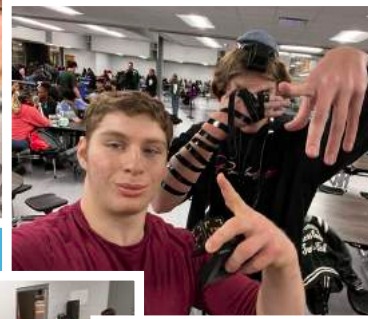
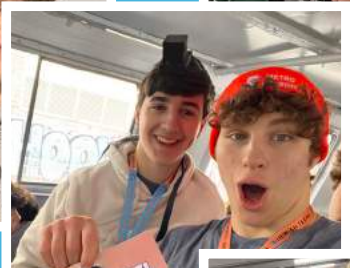
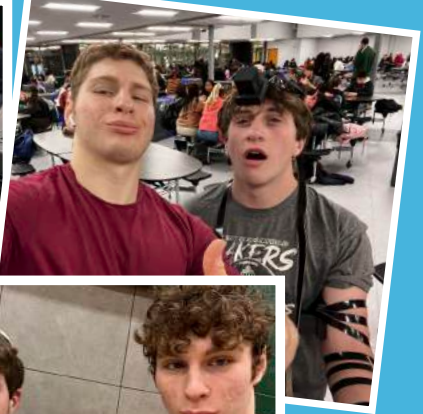
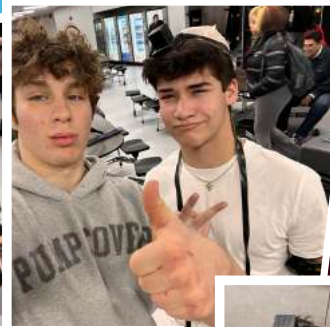
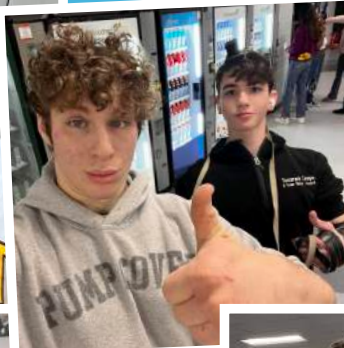
party, when really the main thing is the *tefillin*, and that is something he could have done even during COVID.) I put on *tefillin* with him at school and that was his bar mitzvah. We danced and sang. [Visit [nsheichabadnewsletter.com](https://nsheichabadnewsletter.com) home page to see the video. -Ed.]

NCSY (National Conference of Synagogue Youth) is a Jewish youth group that works to inspire Jewish youth and strengthen their connection with Israel. At NCSY, I met a black man wearing a *kippah* and *lehavdil* a cross. His mother was Jewish, his father was not, so he wore both symbols. Despite going to NCSY, he had never put on *tefillin* in his life. That was another bar mitzvah that I was happy to bring about.

A few Fridays ago, I was in Birmingham, MI, putting on *tefillin* with people in a street mall. I met a guy who was adopted, but it turned out his birth mother was Jewish! Another bar mitzvah!

I was at a Tigers’ baseball game a few weeks ago and my two friends and I ended up sitting in seats that were not the ones we bought. Of course I had my *tefillin* with me. And there was a woman wearing a *chai* necklace and *lehavdil* a cross. She was with a man, and both of them were also sitting in our row, in seats they had not bought. I asked him if he was Jewish and he said yes. I offered him *tefillin*, he refused; I asked again later in the seventh inning stretch, he refused again; but he gave me his card and told me he had season tickets for six and my friends and I could come whenever we wanted. It was interesting that even though he refused *tefillin* this time, he wanted to stay connected with me. I’ll keep you posted.

In my senior year, there were very important wrestling matches, all of them on Shabbos. One of these Shabbosim I spent at Chabad of Commerce, MI. When I arrived there I realized that I had forgotten to bring along my *tzitzit*. I felt so bad about it that I decided from then on to wear them in a way that is visible on the outside of my clothing. I asked myself, what’s going to happen if I wear my *tzitzit* on the outside? The other kids will know



**AT THE KINUS HASHLUCHIM OF 2008**, the *shluchim* pledged to breach the gap between the time Jewish kids graduate Hebrew school and the time when they go to college and can join Chabad on Campus—in other words, to start developing meaningful programming specifically for teens. As a result, Merkos Suite 302 led by the indefatigable Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky created C-Teen (for Chabad Teens), and the first Shabbaton took place in 2008 with 40 teens in attendance (all of whom enjoyed the Friday night *seudas Shabbos* in the Kotlarsky dining room!).

Fifteen years later, C-Teen reaches over 180,000 teens in 711 chapters in 58 countries on six continents.



Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky

**SOME OF THE MANY C-TEEN PROGRAMS...**

**C-Teen U**

College-accredited courses empowering teens to inculcate traditional Torah perspectives into their lives. Six courses to choose from include Judaism 101, Jewish Philosophy, Jewish Business School, Jewish Law School, Israel & Me, and Jewish Wellness (*Tanya*).

**International C-Teen Shabbaton**

An unparalleled weekend of inspiration, Jewish pride, and unity in Crown Heights. To date, 21,000 teens—including Seth Weissman, whose story appears here—have participated.

**Summer Camps**

This summer, 507 teens from 23 countries participated in C-Teen travel camps in Israel, Europe, and the U.S.

**Shluchim Resources**

C-Teen provides resources and guidance to *shluchim* to become more effective with teens.

**Mitzvah Ambassadors**

Teens encourage their peers to perform *mitzvos* at their public schools, handing out Shabbos candles, menorahs, matzah, and challah, and offering the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*.

**Mitzvah Bank**

The Mitzvah Bank provides teens with *tefillin*, Shabbos candles, *tzitzis*, *siddurim*, and *mezuzos*.

**Yeshiva Grants**

There are currently 30 C-Teen alumni who are studying in yeshivos thanks to 5K grants.

**Regional Events**

Regional Shabbatons and trips provide teens the

opportunity to meet and befriend other Jewish teens from their own region.

**High School Clubs**

Through 250 Jewish clubs at local public schools, *shluchim* are reaching many new teens on their turf.

**Mitzvah Booths**

The Mitzvah Booth is a mobile touchpoint to meet teens where they congregate: at various teen conventions (BBYO, JCC Maccabi, March of the Living, StandWithUs) and of course outside of public schools.

**Jewish Heritage Night**

Publicizing the miracles of Chanukah is taken to new heights with public menorah lightings at NFL and NBA games.

**Campus Connect**

Events and networking that acquaint teens with Chabad on Campus so that when they go to college, they know just what to do and whom to contact.

**Leadership**

With over 400 teen leaders from around the world, C-Teen Leadership provides extraordinary networking opportunities.

**C-Teen Lounges**

State-of-the-art space for Jewish teens to make friends, relax, and have fun, while learning about and practicing Judaism at the same time.

**C-Teen Jr.**

C-Teen Jr. offers educational, humanitarian, and social activities for middle schoolers.



Kids at Skokie C-Teen events in Skokie, IL, led by Rabbi Yochanan and Mrs. Yona Posner.



Teen

I'm keeping Torah and *mitzvot*? Nobody's going to beat me up. I'll only gain their respect. As it says in *Shulchan Aruch* and in *Pirkei Avot*, "Be strong as a leopard, and light as an eagle, and swift as a deer, and brave as a lion, to do the will of your Heavenly Father."

This *passuk* inspired me to have courage to do what's right in a strong, sure way.

On other Shabbosim that I traveled to other places for wrestling matches, my parents would book a hotel near the match, and on the buffet table for the wrestlers, we would make sure to have kosher bagels for me to make *kiddush* on. It was difficult, and not an enjoyable Shabbos, to say the least. But the wrestling season was going very well. I entered the post-season with a record of 27-3. I was expected to go to the state tournament, the biggest, most competitive tournament in the state of Michigan.

And then I made myself sick through all the internal pressure, and the high expectations I put on myself—because I was wrestling for a selfish purpose instead of a G-dly purpose. I finished the season 30-7 and did not make the State Tournament. If I had made the State Tournament, I would not have been able to go to the C-Teen international Shabbaton in Crown Heights. However, since I did not make the State Tournament, I would be able attend the Shabbaton... except for one problem: Registration had closed three months before.

I really, *really* wanted to go, I *needed* to go. I reached out everywhere trying to get a spot, but they were full, and registration was closed. Rabbi Yishai Elifiej, *shliach*

in West Bloomfield, told me, "I'll see what I can do." He spent the Tuesday before the Shabbaton calling people and trying very hard to get me in but to no avail. Finally at 2:00 a.m. Wednesday morning, a kid from California backed out and one spot opened up. Rabbi Elifiej called me immediately with the good news!

It was exciting, and a turning point for me. No wonder G-d had orchestrated it so that I was free to come! Dancing and singing in 770 just because we're happy to be Jews, just because we're happy that it's Shabbos, was like nothing I had ever experienced before. And when it wasn't Shabbos, I was doing *mivtza tefillin* at the airport, in Crown Heights with my fellow Shabbaton participants, and everywhere.

The C-Teen Shabbaton was the best time I ever had in my whole life.

On Friday night, Sam Salzs, a football player, spoke for the Shabbaton. I listened to every word. He was playing college football, but with a G-dly purpose. He was making a tremendous *kiddush Hashem* and inspiring others. He inspired me. For the first time in a long time, I enjoyed Shabbos. I wasn't wrestling, sleeping in a hotel, and making *kiddush* on bagels. It was a real Shabbos. I cried out to Sam Salzs. I told him I wanted to quit wrestling and act like a Jew. He said not to quit, but to shift my focus, and do it for G-d. He said if you continue to do sports while in college, you'll be one of three. There's one baseball player who keeps Shabbos; there's Sam Salzs; and then there will be me, Seth Weissman.

Sam told me to be careful not to be consumed by

### IN THE REBBE'S WORDS (TRANSLATED FROM YIDDISH):

"When we inspire the elderly, we inspire one individual alone. This is not the case when we work with the younger generation—individuals with their entire lives ahead of them, young men and women who will one day marry and have children of their own, and who will impart their love for Hashem and His Torah to their children, and through them, establish an upright and blessed future, with the effects continuing to inspire generation after generation. Through reaching individuals while they are still young, we shape the lives of their children, and their children's children, for all generations to come."

# DANCING AND SINGING IN 770 JUST BECAUSE WE'RE HAPPY TO BE JEWS, JUST BECAUSE WE'RE HAPPY THAT IT'S SHABBOS, WAS LIKE NOTHING I HAD EVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE.

wrestling, but to do it for G-d. This would elevate everything I do. I prepared for graduating exams with that mindset—to do everything for a G-dly purpose.

On the C-Teen Shabbaton, people saw my energy and enthusiasm about Judaism, and they tried to convince me to go to Mayanot after graduating high school.

I am graduating high school this week, and in September I am G-d willing going to Mayanot in Israel. I'm very happy about that and really looking forward to the total immersion in Torah.

I decided that while I would be in Israel, I would still wrestle, but no more on Shabbos! As of this interview, Friday, June 16, 2023, I am leaving soon for Mayanot, and after that I plan to go to the University of Michigan, and to try out for the college wrestling team, but not to ever again play any sports on Shabbos. Once Friday night comes, I'll check out from that world and enter the world of *ruchnius*.

I believe in the power of *simchah*, and the power of *niggunim*. *Niggunim* are powerful and can create the right mindset. I don't wait to feel happy and then I'll sing and dance—just the opposite.

Judaism is the only religion that believes that every person has a Divine mission. Did you know that? *Ours is the only religion that believes that*. You don't have to be Jewish to serve G-d. Non-Jews also have a G-dly purpose; they too have their commandments. I tell everyone they have a G-dly purpose. If G-d gave us another day, we have to fill it with serving Him, and bringing Moshiach.

I watch JEM videos every day, videos of the Rebbe. They give me tremendous *chizuk*. I can't wait to meet the Rebbe in person, to shake his hand and thank him for

all the ways he has helped me and continues to help me. I'm going to tell him, "Thank you for inspiring me and instilling within me a passion for *ahavat Yisroel*."

I love the energy in Chabad, and I appreciate the love and caring they show to me. I would like to call myself a *chossid* of the Rebbe; I don't know if I've earned that title yet but at least I'm trying my best to be one.

I am an only child, but I hope one day to have many children.

I am not waiting for Mayanot; I already do *Chitas* every day with Rabbi Yehoshua B. ("Josh") Gordon on Chabad.org. I learn one *perek* of Rambam per day. I learn other things too. Why waste driving time? I learn while I drive.

Now I'm about to add *Rabbeinu Tam tefillin* to my daily *tefillin* ritual, with the encouragement and support of my lifelong friend, Rabbi Shneur. He is getting me the *Rabbeinu Tam tefillin*.

No question that *tefillin* is my favorite *mitzvah*. Hashem created the world out of His infinite kindness. The world's existence is a physical reflection of G-d's infinite kindness. And the spiritual reflection is Torah. We cannot learn Torah constantly, so we put on *tefillin* daily which is a reflection of G-d's kindness to us.

I can do infinite kindness with my fellow Jew through *mitvza tefillin*.

I always had a connection with Judaism in my life; my parents observed the fundamental *mitzvot*. But I didn't have the *simchah*, the meaning, the passion, until the Shabbaton. That lit a fire under me, or revealed the fire that was glowing in the dark. *L'chaim!* ❀