

The Power To Protect, The Power To Heal

RISHE DEITSCH



REB YISROEL GORDON'S TEFILLIN STRAPS

I beg your tolerance that I keep writing about my father, Reb Yisroel Gordon, *a"h*, but the reality is, he passed away two years ago and we are still going through the boxes of precious documents, many of them from his parents and uncles who were born in the 1800s. For example, here's a receipt written by my father's father, Reb Yochanan Gordon, on 1 Iyar 5699 (April 20, 1939), to Reb Boruch Braun, for a donation of \$1.10 to Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch in Warsaw/Otwork.

We found in those boxes a first-person account from my

father of something that happened to him in 1995.

My father wasn't feeling well, and he went to his regular doctor, who sent him to a surgeon, who told him, "Rabbi, you have prostate cancer."

The Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) helps the doctor determine the progression of the disease, and whether one is a candidate for surgery.

My father's PSA was 18. The surgeon told him, "Rabbi, that is very high, and there's no point in having surgery. Your death is imminent. But go to another doctor; here's a referral." And he went to another doctor.

This second opinion agreed with the first.

Then my father went to a world-famous expert, the chief of prostate surgery at Columbia Presbyterian, Dr. Carl Olsson.

He too agreed that with a PSA of 18 or higher, surgery was worthless. He said, "You probably have about ten months to live. It won't be a painful death; one day you just won't wake up."

My father went to the Rebbe's Ohel and wrote a letter, asking for a *refuah sheleimah*. He said *Tehillim*. He davened. He gave *zedakah*.

And then he stood there and he allowed himself to be open to whatever the Rebbe might want to tell him. And the thought that entered his mind was that many times the Rebbe would tell people who came or wrote to him with similar issues that they should check their *tefillin* and *mezuzos*.

My father had taken both his *mezuzos* and *tefillin* to be checked not long before, and he had been told they were all





Rabbi Yisroel and Mrs. Ellen Gordon in 5773/2013.

fine. But he felt that with a *gezeirah* like this hanging over his head, he should maybe look for a different *sofer*. So he decided to visit Rabbi Eliezer Zirkind, who was the Rebbe's *sofer*. He was very well known as a very high-level *sofer*, and *mohel*, and *shochet*, and *talmid chacham*.

My father went to Rabbi Zirkind, who told him, "I'm sorry, but I'm behind on *sifrei Torah* that I have to write, and I can't do it for you. But some of my sons do what I do." His son Rabbi Mayer Zirkind was working alongside him at that moment, so my father turned to him and asked him if he would check his *mezuzos* and *tefillin*. He agreed.

A day or two later, Rabbi Mayer told my father, "I checked the *tefillin* and the actual writing is fine. But people sweat in the summertime, and the straps that rest on the head can become worn out. Yours are totally worn out."

My father had used these straps for over ten years at this point. He now learned for the first time that the average *sofer* doesn't untie and remake the knots to examine the straps; he examines only the parchment. My father asked Rabbi Zirkind to please replace the straps.

A day later, Rabbi Zirkind called my father to say everything was ready. "That will be \$40," he said. "It's \$15 for the new strap and \$25 for my work."

My father was then in Morristown, NJ, where he and his wife, Ellen, lived, but Ellen was in Crown Heights. My father told Rabbi Zirkind, "Thank you! My wife will come by shortly with payment and to pick up the *tefillin*."

He hung up from Rabbi Zirkind and called Ellen. A few

minutes later, the phone rang. "This is Dr. Olsson's office. Your PSA is not 18. It's four. You are a good candidate for surgery."

My father felt faint. He began to shake from the proximity of these phone calls, one from the *sofer* and one from the surgeon.

But the secretary continued calmly, as if nothing exciting had just happened: "We'll see you at the Allen Pavilion next Wednesday at 6:30 a.m. No eating or drinking that morning."

My father had the surgery, recovered slowly over the next several months, and lived another 28 years.

Doctors are given permission to heal. But the Rebbe has a direct line to the Aibershter and he knows what we need to do. We only have to listen.

As we head into Tishrei, when we are judged by Hashem and He makes decisions about the year ahead of us, I ask Hashem to show us, His children who He loves, His *chessed* side and not His *gevurah* side.

And I ask for the wisdom and strength to learn from my father to be proactive and to always try to figure out what the Rebbe would want me to do in any given situation... and then to do it.

We asked Rabbi Yitzchok Raskin of Machon Stam to tell us some of his best stories about checking *mezuzos* and *tefillin*. Please keep reading...



NCN reader Maggie trains her daughter Carmen to kiss the *mezuzah*.

From Machon Stam Archives

Rabbi Yitzchok Raskin of Machon Stam

The Rebbe frequently instructed individuals to ensure their *mezuzahs* and *tefillin* were kosher. When someone approached him with a concern, he often advised verifying the condition and proper placement of these items.

Rabbi Leibel Groner said that in later years (circa 5750), the Rebbe directed his secretaries to inquire whether individuals requesting a *brachah* for health had inspected their *mezuzahs* (and *tefillin*, for men) within the last 12 months. This was shared with me by Rabbi Leibel Groner's nephew, Rabbi Chaim Zvi Groner of Melbourne, Australia.

The Rebbe also strongly advocated for an annual inspection of *mezuzahs*, particularly during the month of Elul, as referenced in the *sefer Mateh Ephraim*.

In addition to thoroughly checking *mezuzahs* for *kashrus*, Machon Stam will assist with proper removal, reinstallation, and placement, ensuring each *mezuzah* is positioned at the correct height and meets all halachic standards.

Recently, an issue arose concerning a specific *sofer* from Ukraine with a beautiful *ksav yad*. Rabbi Yosef Yeshaya Braun of the Crown Heights Beis Din issued a *psak* advising against purchasing *mezuzahs* from this *sofer*, who is not *shomer Shabbos* and is living with a non-Jewish woman.

A young *shliach* from Detroit, Michigan, mailed his *mezuzahs* to me for inspection. I immediately recognized them as having been written by the disqualified Ukrainian *sofer*. I contacted the *shliach* and informed him that his *mezuzahs* were written by "the Ukrainian *sofer*." He was shocked and requested that I overnight the highest-quality *mezuzahs* to him. I asked, "Is everything okay?" He said no but didn't elaborate.

I sent the *mezuzahs* overnight, and approximately two weeks later, the *shliach* shared his story. Five months prior, he and his wife had welcomed their first child. While the baby was healthy, his wife was not recovering. Doctors were unable to diagnose the issue. A specialist recommended a distant hospital for painful surgery, which was deemed "successful,"

yet the pain persisted despite high doses of painkillers. The day after installing the *mezuzahs* from Machon Stam, the *shliach* noticed a significant reduction in his wife's pain. Within a short time, the pain completely disappeared.

Rabbi Levi Kagan, a *sofer* from Detroit, later told me that this particular *shliach* had asked him to check his *mezuzahs*, but he was unavailable. Rabbi Kagan remarked, "*Baruch Hashem* I wasn't available, as I wasn't familiar with the Ukrainian man's script. Your expertise saved him."

Another young *shliach* contacted me, asking, "Can I send pictures of my *mezuzahs* to see if they are from the Ukrainian *sofer*?" I agreed, and upon reviewing the images, I confirmed they were indeed from that source, recognizable by the distinct script. He said, "This explains a lot!"

He had suspected an issue after hearing the first young *shliach*'s story, as he had purchased his *mezuzahs* from the same store and was facing significant personal difficulties.* This conversation occurred at 6:30 p.m., a few days before Pesach. He urgently requested, "Please wait for me at your office. I'm coming now to buy new *mezuzahs* before my flight home tonight." At my office, he confided, "We've been married two years and have had four miscarriages." Recently, he shared good news, *baruch Hashem*.



A man approached me, suffering from severe insomnia; he had been unable to sleep for days. I shared the Rebbe's advice to keep a *mezuzah* beside the bed for insomnia. Weeks later, I encountered him on Kingston Avenue, purchasing a hat. He exclaimed, "Yitzchok, thank you for making me aware of the Rebbe's letter that saved my life! The insomnia was so unbearable, that I had suicidal thoughts. The first night with the *mezuzah* by my bed, I slept three hours, then four the next night, and it kept improving."



Another individual, plagued by migraine headaches, consulted multiple doctors without success. I saw him in shul and he appeared unwell. I mentioned the Rebbe's guidance in *Igros Kodesh* to carry a *mezuzah* with you, for headaches. He admitted, "I saw that in *Igros* but didn't take it seriously." I urged him to visit my office immediately, where I provided him with a *mezuzah*. A week later, he reported no further headaches. Months later, he met me and said, "*Baruch Hashem*, it's working well. There was one day I did get a headache... and then I realized I had left the *mezuzah* at home."



A man brought his *mezuzahs* to Machon Stam because his wife faced major surgery for a serious stomach condition. He noted that every time he opened *Igros Kodesh* for guidance, he found letters from the Rebbe urging *mezuzah* checks. Previous inspections had found no issues, but we discovered a hole in one *mezuzah*. When I showed it to him, he wept, saying, “My wife is suffering from a hole in her stomach and is scheduled for surgery!” We replaced the *mezuzah*, and a week later, he returned, this time crying tears of gratitude. His wife’s condition had resolved itself, and the surgery was canceled.

Menachem Mendel, who works for Machon Stam, received a call near midnight from a woman in distress. “My husband was in a motorcycle accident and is in critical condition with a head injury. Can you check our *mezuzahs* now?” Despite the late hour, Menachem Mendel went to her home, where the family was sitting in the living room, reciting *Tehillim* with broken hearts. Inspecting the *mezuzahs*, he found that the one leading from the master bedroom to the porch was

upside down, with a cracked scroll due to inadequate casing. Menachem Mendel showed it to the family and replaced it the next day with a high-quality *mezuzah*. *Baruch Hashem*, the caller’s husband made a miraculous recovery. Whenever she sees Menachem Mendel, she thanks him, but he responds, “I didn’t save your husband; Hashem’s *mitzvah* of *mezuzah* did.”

Menachem Mendel also received a call from a woman whose son refused to attend yeshivah, citing headaches and stomachaches. Upon collecting her *mezuzahs*, Menachem Mendel noticed the one on her son’s bedroom door was too low, positioned halfway down the doorpost instead of the bottom of the top third. The *mezuzahs* were kosher, but Menachem Mendel reinstalled them correctly. Two weeks later, the woman reported that her son was attending yeshivah happily, with no further complaints.

**Sofrim, being human, are susceptible to error. The intention here is not to, G-d forbid, speak disparagingly of any sofrim or vendors. We only want to emphasize the importance of vigilance in ensuring the kashrus of mezuzahs, and to raise awareness about its seriousness.*



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