

This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances. (7:12)

Rashi notes that the homiletic interpretation of *eikev*, which means heel, alludes to the sort of *mitzvos* which people do not take seriously, that they regard as unimportant. Thus, they figuratively “tread upon them with their heels.” The Torah assures us that if we are careful to observe even these so-called “neglected” *mitzvos*, Hashem will certainly reward our efforts. The message is basic. We have no way to determine the value and weight of *mitzvos*. They are **all** decrees from Hashem which we are commanded to carry out – “no ands, ifs, or buts.”

We find another form of neglected *mitzvah*. It is a *mitzvah* which one performs “financially,” but not emotionally. One can spend thousands of dollars to purchase a pair of *Tefillin*, yet not think about what he is wearing and why. We think that all one has to do is overspend on the *mitzvah* – buy the most expensive *matzah*; make the most expensive *Succah*; or spend *Succos* in the Holy Land – and then one has been *yotzei*, fulfilled, the *mitzvah* in accordance with everything that Hashem asks. The money is spent, but the *mitzvah* remains an “*eikev*” – afterthought.

I have seen individuals incarcerated in the penal system, who are permitted to use *Tefillin* once a week, or whenever the chaplain is in attendance. The excitement, devotion and religious fervor of these men would cause one to imagine that the *Tefillin* they are placing upon themselves are extraordinary – when, in fact, they are seventy-years-old and barely kosher. It is all in the **attitude** – not in the expenditure.

Horav David Tebel, zl, Rav of Minsk, was a brilliant *gaon*, scholar and Talmudist. He authored the *Nachlas David*, a volume of commentary on the *Talmud* that is a staple for any serious student of *Talmud*. Prior to becoming *Rav* in Minsk, he served as *Rav* in a small village whose Jewish community was even smaller. The community did not have the wherewithal to support a rabbi. Thus, the *Rav* subsisted on less than little, often going without a piece of bread and no food for *Shabbos*.

A few times each year, two wealthy Jewish businessmen from another city would come before him with a *din Torah*, monetary dispute. They chose him for his fair and clear adjudication of the law. Appreciating the *Rav*’s common sense approach to their *halachic* dispute, they both paid him handsomely for his service. This fee sustained his family.

One time, following a *din Torah*, *Rav* David asked them to sit for a moment. He had a request to make of them: “You are aware that during the past years, I have served as your *Rav* to render *halachic* judgment concerning your business dealings. I was glad to help, and I never asked for monetary recompense – although, I admit, that you were both more than kind in your manner of reimbursement. Now I must go against my grain, however, and ask you to help me with an issue that I find overwhelming. My daughter recently became engaged to a fine young man, a budding

Torah scholar, who will one day be a jewel in the crown of Torah. I obligated myself to pay my daughter's dowry, which comes to a substantial sum. As you probably are aware, I do not have a penny to my name. I, therefore, am breaking with tradition and asking you to help me in my time of need."

Rav David concluded his request, hoping that their response would be immediate and positive. He was taken aback when they told him, "*Rebbe*, we give our *Maaser*, tithe money, to the *Rav* of our community. We feel each Jewish community should worry about and attend to the needs of its individual *Rav*. We take care of our own, and we suggest that the *Rav's kehillah*, congregation, attend to the needs of its own spiritual leader."

Rav David listened to their response and said, "Let me share a powerful story with you. Perhaps it will better illuminate the issues for you. A wealthy man became ill and passed away suddenly, in the flower of his youth. Aside from his enormous wealth, he left over a very special pair of *Tefillin* that were written by a *sofer*, scribe, of saintly repute.

The *Tefillin* alone were of great value. As occurs often in the best of families, a dispute arose between the surviving sons as to who should inherit the *Tefillin*. Rather than fight and become enemies, they decided to sell the *Tefillin* and split the proceeds evenly. In the meantime, the *Tefillin* lay in a drawer in their father's desk.

"One young brother had yet not become *bar-mitzvah*. As the *bar-mitzvah* of the young orphan was rapidly approaching, the brothers decided that nothing could be more appropriate than to give their father's *Tefillin* to their little brother. The young *bar-mitzvah* boy put on the *Tefillin* in earnest, realizing their value, both in a spiritual and sentimental sense. They remained with him his entire life; he never missed a day of putting on his special *Tefillin*. Well, actually, he did miss one day.

"The young boy became a wealthy businessman whose business dealings carried him far and wide. Wherever he went, he had his *Tefillin* with him. They never left his side. One night, while on the road, he was snowed in and could not return to his hotel in the city. The roads would be impassable for at least a day. He became an emotional wreck. Not only did he not have his special *Tefillin* with him – he had **no** *Tefillin*. How could he *daven*? Where could he obtain a pair of *Tefillin*?

"The gentile with whom he was dealing remembered that one old Jew lived in the town. Perhaps he had a pair of *Tefillin* which the businessman could borrow. The gentile immediately sought out the Jew, who was only too happy to lend his *Tefillin* to a co-religionist. Regrettably, the *Tefillin* were ancient, the color peeling. He had no idea who had written them. At best, they were kosher *b'dieved*, ex-post facto. The businessman had no choice but to use them, but still hoped that he would make it back to his hotel in time to use his own. Unfortunately, his hope of returning on time did not materialize. This would be the only time in his life that he had not worn his father's *Tefillin*. Hopefully, at the appropriate time, he would not be called to task for it.

“Life does not go on forever – even for the high and mighty. One day we all must stand before the Heavenly Tribunal and offer our excuses for the failures in our life. Some are lucky. They prepare in this life. Others are not so fortunate. Our “hero” went the way of all men and, in due time, he too stood before the Heavenly Tribunal. How shocked his *neshamah*, soul, was to hear the words, *karkafta d’lo monach Tefillin*, “A person who did not put on *Tefillin*.” Apparently in Heaven, they were aware of something that had eluded him in this world. The *Tefillin* which he thought were so exceptional, were in fact, *pasul*, unfit, disqualified! He had no idea, but one does not dispute the Heavenly Tribunal. The punishment for a Jew who does not wear *Tefillin* – for one who is a *posheia Yisrael b’gufan*, transgresses the law with his body – is eternal *Gehinom*, Purgatory!

“Imagine how this *neshamah* trembled as the prosecuting angels grabbed hold of him and were about to carry out his punishment immediately. Suddenly, a different angel came forward and declared, ‘Wait! I have something. One time, he was stuck in a snowstorm and he borrowed an old pair of *Tefillin* that were kosher! He is no longer a person who **never** put on *Tefillin*. He wore *Tefillin* **once** in his life!’ Indeed, those unseemly *Tefillin* saved the day for him.

“My friends,” Rav David told the two men, “It is certainly true that you have designated your *tzedakah*, charitable endeavors, for certain purposes, which I am sure are very noble and important. Nevertheless, perhaps my daughter’s wedding will be that specific *tzedakah* that will make the difference concerning your eternal future.” We never know!