

And it shall be for you a sign, your arm and a reminder between your eyes. (13:9)

The *mitzvah* of *Tefillin* – two boxes which each contain four short *parshiyos* from the Torah inscribed on parchment, and worn on the arm and the forehead – is one of the most important *mitzvos* of the Torah. One of the boxes is worn on the arm, opposite the heart, which is the seat of one's emotions; the other is placed above the forehead, resting opposite the cerebrum. Thus, our attention is directed to the head, the heart and to the hand, thereby implying that our actions must be dedicated to Hashem in such a manner that we conjoin our emotions/passion together with our intellect and power of reason. Placed on the arm opposite the heart and on the head, the *Tefillin* signify the submission of one's mind, heart and actions to Hashem, as well as the reign of the intellect over emotion. We must experience a balance between the two, applying the heart and mind to our everyday endeavor. *Tefillin* comprise the badge of the Jew. Indeed, the *Talmud* is referring to one who is no longer observant, calling him a *karkafta di lo manach Tefillin*, "one who does not put on *Tefillin*." It is the single act of service to the Almighty that defines our relationship with Him. One who does not put on *Tefillin* has rejected this relationship.

Tefillin are symbolically identified with *bar-mitzvah*, despite the fact that, when a boy reaches Jewish adulthood (thirteen years old), he becomes obligated in executing all 613 *mitzvos*. Why is *Tefillin* singled out? *Mishnas Yeshoshua* (quoted by *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*) explains that the mere fact that *Tefillin shel yad*, the *Tefillin* worn on the arm, are put on prior to placing the *Tefillin shel rosh*, the *Tefillin* of the head, on the forehead, is – in and of itself – a powerful lesson in *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. We imply that we, as Jews, are prepared "to do," even before our mind/intellect, seat of reason, is able to grasp the rationale for the *mitzvah*. We accept the yoke of service to Hashem, as we declared at *Har Sinai, Naaseh v'nishma*; "We will do and we will listen." As a young boy enters adulthood, he must ingrain in his mind that, as Jews, we serve, we act, even when circumstances appear questionable, even when we do not truly understand the *mitzvah*. Lack of rationale (which is on our part) is no reason for faltering in performing a *mitzvah*.

Tefillin is about love – between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. When one loves, any form of separation is overwhelming. Every moment spent together is exceedingly precious. Every bit of communication, every memento, anything that reminds one of his love, is treasured. Thus, a simple ring that is given to concretize the bond of love has special meaning. Every time one looks at the ring, the love is remembered. Hashem's love for His children is the greatest love that exists. To believe in Hashem is to share this love. Hashem's creating the world purely for altruistic reasons was an act of love. His love is boundless, infinite, beyond anything that we can possibly fathom. It is in force even when we do not deserve it, because a loving Father never gives up on his child. Nonetheless, it is our duty to strengthen that bond of love. Faith and love are extremely tenuous concepts. We speak of them and think about them, but, unless we do something definitive/tangible to concretize these emotions, our attention wanes, and they become nebulous and insignificant, the victims of complacency.

Tefillin serves to help us remember the love. It is our ring, the concretization of our relationship. The Torah talks of three forms of love: “*b’chol levavecha*, “with all your heart;” *b’chol nafshecha*, “with all your soul;” *u’bchol me’odecha*, “and with all your might.” The *Tefillin* worn on the left arm, opposite the heart, submits/dedicates our heart, the seat of life, to the love of Hashem. The *Tefillin* worn next to the brain, the seat of one’s intellect and soul, represents our dedication to loving Hashem with all our soul. The *Tefillin* worn on the arm, the symbol of strength, binds all of our powers to the love of G-d.

Now we understand that one who rejects *Tefillin* repudiates Hashem’s love – and faith without love is lacking in conviction.

Walking into a *shul* in the morning and looking around at the worshippers putting on their *Tefillin* gives one the impression that it is a simple, everyday ritual act– which it is. We all put on *Tefillin* out of habit. Some run into *shul*, put on (the *Tallis* followed by) *Tefillin* and move on to the daily *davening*. Some might arrive earlier to recite *Tehillim*, to learn, but, when it comes to the *Tefillin*, it is usually the same: put them on as a preparations for *davening*. As we all know, however, the action is only as good as the accompanying attitude. Obviously, one should keep in mind that he is performing a special *mitzvah* that underscores the reciprocal love we share with Hashem. I came across the following thought from the *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, *Horav Aryeh Levine, zl*, which is quite inspiring.

As *Rav Ha’assirim*, chaplain to those incarcerated by the British, *Rav Aryeh* had the sad experience of spending the last days and moments with the *Kedoshim* who had been found guilty by the British court and sentenced to die. When *Rav Aryeh* spoke to the pre-*bar-mitzvah* boys in the *mamlachti dati* school in Hertziliya, he described to the boys the last few hours of the lives of two martyrs.

The *Rav* came with two pairs of *Tefillin* for the two men to put on for the last time. They took them into their hands and could not stop kissing the boxes. They put them on and, with tears flowing down their faces, they recited *Shema Yisrael*. When they removed the *Tefillin*, they held them lovingly, unable to let go of them. Finally, the guard signaled that their time was up. They had to take their last walk.

Rav Aryeh looked at the boys and asked, “Is it only when we are parting from the *Tefillin* for the last time in our life that we should be so emotional? What about one who has his entire life ahead of him – should he not cherish every moment spent with his *Tefillin*?”

How true. We act instinctively, because we are creatures of habit. If we would remember that the *Tefillin* are Hashem’s sign of abiding love for us, we might manifest greater care and feeling when we put on our *Tefillin*.

One last story. *Reb Yosef* lived in one of Yerushalayim’s large apartment complexes. A friendly

fellow, he made it a point to get to know everyone who lived there – not because he was particularly nosy; he just liked to help people. One elderly man rarely went out. He suffered from a large bump on his back. He sat home alone, learning. The neighbors treated him royally, looking out for him and offering assistance whenever possible. They knew neither his life story, nor the reason for the unsightly bump on his back.

One day, this man felt sick, and he was taken to the hospital. The situation quickly advanced to a serious state. Having developed a relationship with *Reb* Yosef, he called for him. Obviously, *Reb* Yosef dropped whatever he was doing and proceeded to the hospital where the man was hooked up to a number of lines and tubes. The situation did not look hopeful. The man looked up at *Reb* Yosef and said, “I have to ask you for a favor. I really have no one else. I have one son who lives somewhere in the diaspora. Unfortunately, he left the fold years ago, and we have nothing to do with one another. If somehow you are able to contact him, I have an envelope of money with me for you to use to purchase a pair of *Tefillin* for him. Although he is not *frum*, observant, now, I am certain once I “transition” to the *Olam Ha’Emes*, World of Truth, I will be able to intercede on his behalf that he be imbued with a desire to return to Hashem’.

The man continued talking, realizing that this was probably his last chance to relate the story of his life for posterity. Perhaps his son would one day find it meaningful: “I was six years old when my mother died. My father was unable to care for me, so the neighbors lent a hand. Thus, I went from home to home, caregiver to caregiver; no mother, no father to speak of – I was alone in the world. I wanted so much to learn. I met a kind man who was a candle maker. I made a deal with him: I would sell his candles all over the city, while he would hire a Torah tutor for me whom he would pay with my wages

“One day”, he continued, with tears beginning to well-up in his eyes, “I came to a home occupied by a group of men who had long ago left the Jewish religion. They made fun of my religious garb, my *payos*, long jacket and black hat. They were bent on causing me to sin. The pressure was mounting until I ran to the window and jumped – not realizing that we were on the third floor! I was badly injured and, after months in the hospital, I was released with a stark reminder of the accident. That terrible bump has been with me ever since. Somehow, later in life, I met a wonderful woman who, despite my disfigurement, married me. We had a son. When he was a teenager, my wife died, leaving me to raise him alone. I did the best I could, but, apparently, it was not enough.

“I have one more favor to ask of you. Please bring me a map of the cemetery which shows the available parcels of land for burial. I would like to select my final resting place.” The next day, *Reb* Yosef returned with the map of the cemetery. The man nixed most of the places. He obviously had demanding criteria concerning next to whom he wanted to lay. He explained, “From the time that I jumped from the window, I was careful never to look at anything, anyone, or anywhere that was spiritually harmful to my eyes. I avoided sin by my willingness to relinquish my life. I would like to lie next to someone whom I am certain guarded his eyes his entire life.” In the end, he selected a corner of the cemetery where old *shaimos*, Torah volumes that were unusable, and infants that had

tragically died, were buried. The man died the next morning. His burial took place that very same day. The work of locating his son began in earnest.

The story continues in America. Thousands of cars were moving back and forth on the highway. One car (the driver) lost control and sustained serious injuries. He was taken to the emergency room and, after a day, moved to a hospital bed to recuperate. Two days later, a man entered his hospital room, and said, "Good morning. I am visiting from the Holy Land. I heard that there is a young man with ties to *Eretz Yisrael* convalescing in the hospital. I decided to come visit you." They began to speak. The patient told the visitor about his father who "lived" in *Eretz Yisrael*. The man listened: "Actually, I knew your father. Very special man. Indeed, he was a holy soul!" The son had no idea that his father had died. One more of life's challenges for him to deal with.

The son told his visitor, "I do not know what has come over me. It has been more than twenty years since I last put on *Tefillin*. I reneged on my religious observance. Suddenly, the last few months 'something' has been compelling me to return to my People, to once again become observant." (This was probably due to his father's Heavenly intercession.)

The visitor from *Eretz Yisrael* returned home and immediately contacted *Reb Yosef*, relating to him the story of the elderly man's son. *Reb Yosef* went out that day and purchased a fine, kosher pair of *Tefillin* and sent it to the man's son, who was in the process of becoming a *baal teshuvah*, returning to his religious observance. We derive from here, says the *Nadvorna Rebbe, Shlita* (who heard the story from *Reb Yosef*), that when one acts with *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, the influence of this action will endure and be the source of positive inspiration for generations to come.