



ARMING OUR SOLDIERS: Tefillin for our Fighters



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Why are we seeing such unprecedented interest in tefillin among IDF soldiers?

Almost every week since Oct. 7, I have either been meeting with soldiers on their bases before they enter Gaza or meeting soldiers who were injured in Gaza and are now in the hospital. Thousands of these soldiers have asked me for tefillin. Over and over, they've said to me: "Rabbi Friedman — I have my bulletproof vest, I have my machine gun, but I will not enter Gaza without tefillin!"

For over 10 years, I have been building tefillin *gemachim* (tefillin lending services) on army bases all across Israel. Very often before a *chayal* enters a dangerous mission, he will put on tefillin and say Shema. When a *chayal* accepts upon himself to keep the mitzvah of tefillin daily, then he is given his own pair. Now, over 6,000 *chayalim*

have signed onto my list accepting to keep this mitzvah. Why?

Where is this deep-seated connection to tefillin — even among non-affiliated Jews — coming from?

Take Harel, for example. He was never fortunate to learn Gemara. Yet when he told me, "I must have tefillin; it's my spiritual protection," he was echoing the Gemara in *Brachos* 6a:

"וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך." ותניא, רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר: אלו תפילין שבראש.

"And all the nations of the land shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they will fear you" (Devarim 28:10). It was taught in a baraisa that Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: This is a reference to the tefillin of the head.

The one mitzvah, which, according to Chazal, puts fear in the eyes of our enemies is that of tefillin. The Gra understands this Gemara not as merely

tefillin shel rosh (tefillin that goes on the head), but rather *tefillin sheb'rosh* (tefillin in the head). The power of tefillin lies in our integrating the meaning of tefillin and our desire to connect with Hashem into our heads — into our essence.

Eyal, another soldier, told me that he and his friends all recognize that what happened on Oct. 7 was way beyond the realm of *derech hateva*. IDF soldiers and fellow Jews aren't the only ones saying this. Even gentiles have heard about my tefillin campaign and reached out to me. One minister from England called me and stressed how clear it

is to him that the G-d of the Jewish People is the only answer to this terrible predicament. He stressed what our leaders have been saying: we cannot be victorious without the spiritual weapons of tefillin, prayer, and learning Torah.

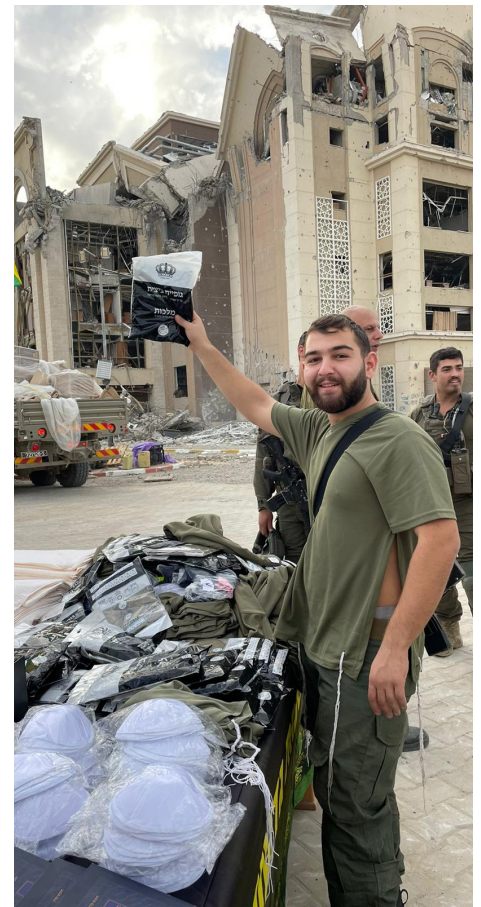
This is similar to the words of Rav Asher Weiss shlit" a in a video he created to encourage us to provide tefillin for our soldiers (see <https://israelect.org/rabbinic-approbations/>). He explains in the video that it is clear to all that the only real Power that can save us is Hashem. The soldiers and I have encountered this numerous times, understanding that even with a strong army, without the spiritual support, we cannot succeed. He quotes the Rambam (*Hilchos Mezuzah* 6:13), which states that we are surrounded by four mitzvos that together work to strengthen us: mezuzah, tzitzis, tefillin shel yad, tefillin shel rosh. The IDF provides the first two, but not tefillin. That's why Jews from all around the world have stepped up to fill in this gap and provide the spiritual protection of tefillin for our soldiers.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 16) writes *acharei hapeulos nimshachim halevavos* — our hearts are drawn after actions. As physical beings, the pull of a mitzvah is stronger when it has a physical aspect to it — like tefillin. Tefillin is not just a mitzvah of *dibur* (speech); it is one of action. We are *k'viyachol* tying ourselves to Hashem.

When tying the straps to their arms, the soldiers feel a deep and special *kavana*. Their great yearning to connect and tie themselves to Hashem is palpable. Rav Gedalia Schorr zt"l (*Ohr Gedalyahu, parshas Bo*, page 58) writes that all mitzvos are a remembrance of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. He explains further: When we do a mitzvah, we are actually bringing down *ha'aros* (best explained

as spiritual powers) of that mitzvah into our present lives. Rav Schorr notes that the mitzvah of tefillin appears at the end of parshas Bo. Why is it specifically there? He explains that, at this stage in Jewish history, we are transitioning from being *avadim* (servants) of Paroh to *avadim* of Hashem. We know that there are four *parshiyos* (paragraphs) in tefillin. Rav Schorr explains that the first two discuss *yetzias Mitzrayim* and the last two discuss *kabalas ol malchus Shamayim* (accepting the yoke of heaven). He quotes the Sfas Emes who explains that tefillin is like a *shtar shichrur* — a document of freedom. With a *shtar shichrur*, one transitions from servitude to freedom. When a Jew puts on tefillin, he is freeing himself from all types of servitude to material matters. He is freeing himself from his own challenges and becomes a free person ready to accept the yoke of heaven.

When a soldier, or any Jew for that matter, puts on tefillin, he is not only bringing down the *ha'aros* of *yetzias Mitzrayim* to the world, but he is also reiterating his belief that he is a servant of Hashem and accepts Hashem as his King and Leader. In the merit of tefillin, and all of our mitzvos, along with our tefillos and tehillim, may Hashem bring a successful end to this war. May we see the safe return of the hostages, our soldiers, and a complete recovery of the injured.



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