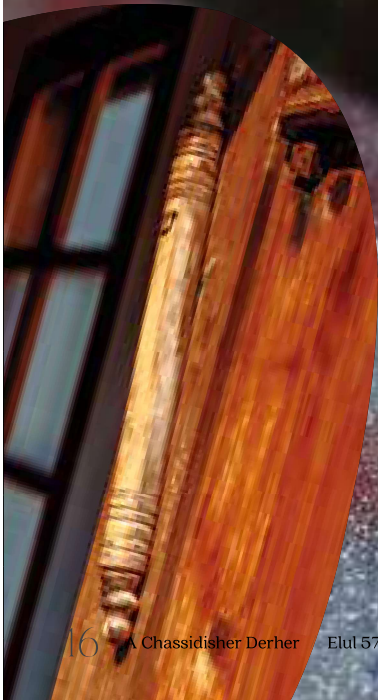


HEART, MIND, AND HOME

checking tefillin and mezuzot



לזכות
הרה"ת ר' צבי הירש
וזוגתו מרת חנה ומשפחתם שיחיו
באקמאן



Throughout the years of the Rebbe's *nesius*, there were a few 'classic' answers that Chassidim would receive in response to inquiries and requests. For example, the Rebbe would almost always respond to letters with "Azkir al haTziyun—I will mention it at the Ohel."

One unique response was "*bedikas tefillin u'mezuzos*—check your tefillin and mezuzos." Countless stories abound with miracles that resulted from this instruction of the Rebbe.

The Rebbe also emphasized that during the month of Elul, it is a general Jewish custom to check tefillin and mezuzos. In conjunction with Elul this year, we bring you the following pages with stories, instructions and the Rebbe's overall attitude toward every aspect of *kashrus* and *hiddur* in tefillin and mezuzos.

THE HALACHA

Why do we check tefillin in the first place? Must tefillin and mezuzos be checked according to *halacha*?

The Gemara says¹ that a mezuzah on a personal home must be checked twice every seven years, and a mezuzah of the *tzibbur* must be checked twice every 50 years.

The Talmud Bavli doesn't give specific instructions for tefillin, but the Yerushalmi writes: "Rebbe says: Tefillin must be checked once every 12 months. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: They don't need to be checked at all. Hillel Hazaken said: My tefillin are from my maternal grandfather" (— indicating that they were never checked).² The *halacha* based on this statement would be quite simple. We rule according to Hillel, so tefillin do not need to be checked. Indeed, that is the ruling of the Rambam.³

However, Mechilta⁴ and Midrash Tanchuma⁵ have a different *girsah*. According to their version, Beis Hillel is of the opinion that they must be checked once a year, while Beis Shammai maintains that they don't need to be checked at all. In fact, they also bring the story about Hillel's grandfather's tefillin, but they attribute the story not to Hillel but to Shammai!

As a practical *halacha*, the Shulchan Aruch rules⁶ according to the Yerushalmi, that tefillin don't need to be checked at all (unless they are only worn occasionally, in which case they must be checked twice every seven years). However, in *sefarim* throughout the generations,⁷ many *poskim* recommend checking tefillin anyway twice every seven years. First of all, you thereby observe the opinion of the Midrash, and secondly, tefillin have often been found to be *posul*.

Certain *poskim* suggested checking them even more often. In *Orchos Chayim*, there is a custom attributed to the Baalei Tosfos to check tefillin once a year, and in later generations, as recorded in Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, it became customary to check tefillin and mezuzos during the month of Elul. The Rebbe often mentioned this custom during the month of Elul.⁸



the rebbe's instructions

The Rebbe's instructions to check tefillin and mezuzos usually came with no explanations. Often, the Rebbe would just write a *roshei teivos*: בדהמזוהת"פ (—*bedikas hamezuzos v'hatfillin*, check your mezuzos and tefillin). However, there were occasions when the Rebbe added that they should be checked only if they had not been checked during the preceding year.⁹

In one letter, the Rebbe explained to a questioner that his instruction to check tefillin wasn't because he suspected that something was wrong, but because the opinion of the Mechilta was to check tefillin once a year, especially because tefillin and mezuzos can deteriorate. "And when it comes to health," the Rebbe adds, "we engage in activities even with the slightest hope that they will better the situation."¹⁰

As a general rule, the Rebbe encouraged people to check them regularly. In a *sicha* in Elul 5748*, the Rebbe asked that the custom to check tefillin be publicized as a worthy *minhag* to do during Elul.¹¹

During Mivtza Mezuzah, when various individuals raised questions about the Rebbe's push for a massive mezuzah-checking campaign, the Rebbe explained that in our day, tefillin and mezuzos are of inferior quality, and weather and other factors can damage them.

It was especially important to hold the campaign, the Rebbe explained, because some tefillin and mezuzos are *possul* when they are sold! Many unsuspecting Jews purchase their mezuzos from unscrupulous sellers, who sell them paper mezuzos *lechatchilah*. The Rebbe mentioned that on one occasion, a mezuzah was found to contain *Birchas Kohanim*, no less!¹²

In the later years, the Rebbe instituted this directive as a unique standard response — if a person called *mazkirus* with a health problem, they were to suggest checking tefillin and mezuzos even without consulting the Rebbe first!

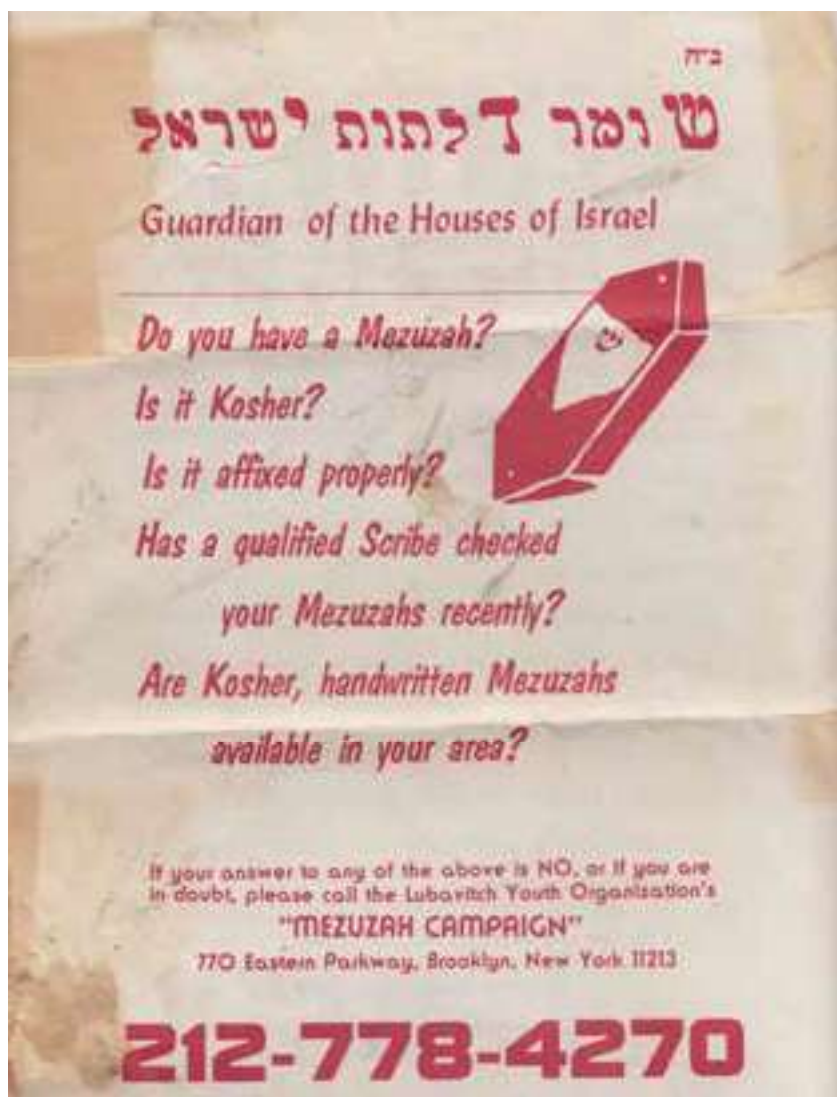
the first tefillin messages

The Rebbe's '*koch*' in tefillin and mezuzos can be traced back to 5704*,

when Machane Yisrael began outreach to Jewish soldiers serving in the United States Military, much before the era of *mivtzoim*, which began in 5727*. One of the main initiatives was to encourage soldiers to put on tefillin every day, and they were offered pairs of tefillin for a low price.

The Rebbe sent a letter to the soldiers which contained a message from the Frierdiker Rebbe about

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*📅 5748-1988, 5704-1944, 5727-1967

wearing Tefillin - a message which was echoed by the Rebbe many years later:

“Our sages said that someone who puts on tefillin lives a long life. Our brothers in the military! Make sure to put on tefillin each and every weekday! A soldier who cannot put them on in the morning, should do so in the afternoon, as long as it is before sundown. This is a *segulah* for Hashem to bring them home in peace.”¹³

In a letter to a donor, the Rebbe explains that this ‘Mivtza Tefillin’ was one of the most significant parts of Machane Yisrael’s work with the military.

“With Hashem’s help,” the Rebbe writes, “the campaign is successful. Many of those who haven’t worn tefillin for many years, or perhaps have never worn it in their lives, have now begun to fulfill this great mitzvah.”

Towards the end of the same letter, the Rebbe encourages him to take part in the *mivtza* as well.

“Once we are on the topic, I will suggest that since you’ve had the merit of supporting the purchase of tefillin... speak to your acquaintances who cherish G-d’s word, and begin an organized campaign in your city to promote tefillin...”¹⁴

taking it to a new level

The days before the Six Day War ushered in an entirely new *tekufah* with regards to Mivtza Tefillin. As the entire Jewish world trembled at the thought of a war against all Arab armies, the Rebbe publicly declared that victory was at hand, and announced the *mivtza* — the first of all *mivtzoim* — that every Jewish male over bar mitzvah, and especially every soldier, put on tefillin “that are checked, kosher and *mehudar*.”¹⁵ The benefits were two-fold: The Gemara associates wearing tefillin with long life, and also says that tefillin will cause the other nations to fear us.

A massive campaign was set in motion, encouraging tefillin wearing in the IDF and throughout the world. Countless Jews put on tefillin during those early months, and the inspiration continued for a long time afterwards. The tefillin stand at the Kosel has given the merit of tefillin to more than a million Jews over the years.

Although the war concluded within one week, the Rebbe didn’t allow the *mivtza* to end, and continued to speak about it regularly for years afterwards.

Despite the fact that the Rebbe announced many initiatives in the years that followed, Mivtza Tefillin retained its pride of place. Every Shabbos after davening in 770, the *gabbai* would make an announcement encouraging *anash* to go on *mivtzoim* on Sunday, when they were off of work; this announcement continued for decades.¹⁶

from tefillin to mezuzos

Before Chanukah 5734*, the Rebbe began expanding the *mivtzoim* campaigns. Chanukah and Purim *mivtzoim* were taken to new levels, and the Rebbe announced three new campaigns around Yud Shevat: Mezuzah, Tzedakah and Bayis Malei Sefarim.

In the following Iyar, a mass terror attack occurred in the Israeli town of Maalot, and many children were killed.¹⁷ The Rebbe asked to check the mezuzos in the school they were in, and shockingly, the *possole* mezuzos matched the number of casualties.

We cannot suggest, the Rebbe said, that the reason people were killed was because there was a problem with the mezuzos. But, on the other hand, just as a soldier must wear his helmet for protection, a mezuzah protects the inhabitants of the home just as well.

The most suitable response to the tragedy, the Rebbe said, would be to



reach out to every Jewish home and ensure that they affix proper, kosher mezuzos (as well as *sefarim* and a tzedakah *pushka*).¹⁸

During the following months, the Rebbe intensified the mezuzah campaign, encouraging that every Jewish home have kosher mezuzos, through checking old ones and purchasing new ones. During the same period, the *bochurim* at 770 invented the mitzvah tanks, and they started going out to the streets of New York every single day, spreading the Rebbe’s message.

Throughout Sivan, Tammuz and further, the mezuzah campaign was a constant presence in the Rebbe’s *sichos*,



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and the Rebbe held several special farbrengens just to promote these mitzvot.

the all encompassing mitzvot

One of the enduring themes in the Rebbe's letters and *sichos* is the inherent connection between physicality and spirituality. Some people prefer to compartmentalize their life into separate sections, separating the spiritual from the mundane, but the Rebbe always explained that Torah, being *Toras Emes* and *Toras Chayim*, is relevant and important in every aspect of life.

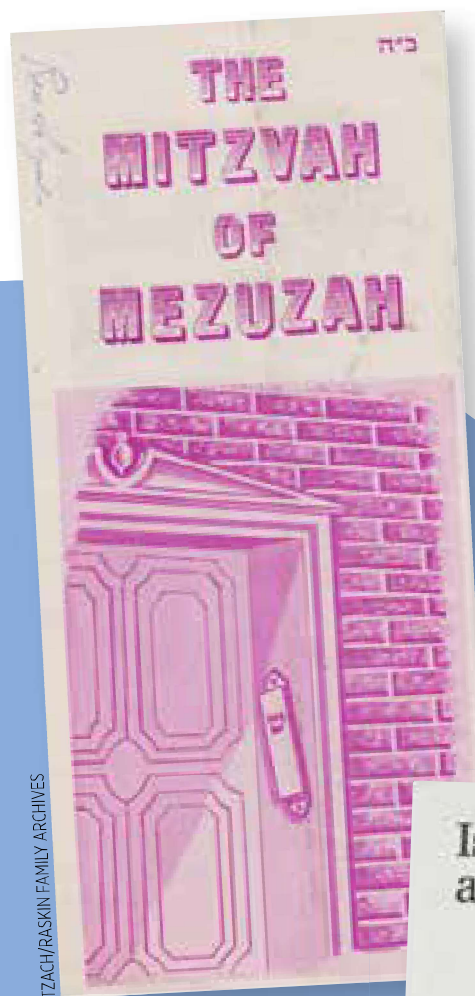
"There is surely no need to point out to you," the Rebbe writes to one individual, "that *ruchnius* and *gashmius* are connected with one another. Medical experts recognize that the health of the body is associated with the health of the soul, and not only with the soul in general but with the *nefesh ha'Elohis* in particular..."

Throughout the years, patterns emerged in which the Rebbe pointed to specific connections between physical and spiritual; if someone was lacking in a specific matter, the Rebbe often instructed them to focus on the mitzvah that related to that specific field. For families who struggled to have children, the Rebbe

suggested renewed focus on *taharas hamishpacha*, and for individuals struggling with financial issues, the Rebbe pointed to Shabbos observance or tzedakah.

But there was one concept that the Rebbe employed overall — as something that was relevant to all issues: Meticulous observance of the mitzvot of tefillin and mezuzah. It is difficult to describe how many topics the Rebbe associated with checking tefillin and mezuzot.

The Rebbe gave this suggestion to people traveling to Eretz Yisroel, to people struggling to have children, to people struggling with all sorts of



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health issues, and as a simple response to people requesting a 'generic' *bracha*.

It was applicable to spiritual and physical maladies alike. People who lacked *bitachon*, who sought success, who were losing their memory, who were struggling with raising children in the way of Yiddishkeit, who had bad dreams, who were struggling with faith, loneliness or *yiras Shamayim*, anger, learning disabilities, *machshavos zaros*, *shidduchim*, *shalom bayis* — they were all instructed to check their tefillin and mezuzos. It is difficult to find an issue in which the Rebbe *didn't* suggest checking tefillin and mezuzos.¹⁹

The mitzvos of tefillin and mezuzah are not minor aspects in our *avodas Hashem*; on a spiritual level, they have broad implications.

Tefillin impacts our *shibud halev vehamoach*, as we will explain, changing our very nature. Mezuzah is a mitzvah that serves as a reminder of Hashem's presence and a general protection from harm.

Both are central to the life of a Yid, and hence are possible solutions to any issue that might appear in a person's life. At any junction and at every challenge — as we see from the Rebbe's instructions — checking one's tefillin and mezuzos is a worthy endeavor.

One individual approached the Rebbe at a *yechidus* of Machane Yisrael, and asked, "Is there anything I should be doing to help bring Moshiach?"

The Rebbe responded immediately:

"The first thing to do is to check your tefillin and the mezuzos in your house. The second thing is to spread Yiddishkeit around you as much as possible."

Reading the Rebbe's instructions, we discover a very basic point. Whenever we are faced with a challenge, be it physical or spiritual, don't look at it from a superficial level,

seeking to correct the apparent issue. Go to the source — Torah and *mitzvos*, the spiritual life-source that sustains us — and correct the deeper issue that is causing the external problem.

a rebbe's look

While many directives to check tefillin and mezuzos came through *maanos*, there were also many people who received the directive at “dollars” encounters, which, to our benefit, were fully recorded on video.

In many of those videos, we clearly see ‘*Rebbishe hanhaga*’ at play. A great variety of people will approach the Rebbe requesting the very same blessing, yet, some of them are instructed to check their tefillin and mezuzos, while others are not. For reasons that remain unbeknown to us, the Rebbe felt that those specific people were in need of that directive.

The Rebbe instructed one woman to check her mezuzos after she suffered from migraine headaches. When she commented that she had just purchased new ones, the Rebbe responded that sometimes, new mezuzos need to be checked as well.

One fellow was instructed by the Rebbe on several occasions to check his tefillin and mezuzos, and when he responded that he had checked them and they had been found to be kosher, the Rebbe said — quite uncharacteristically — “*Es shTIM nisht*—it doesn’t make sense.” Sometime later, he returned to report that he had discovered the issue.

Over time, Chassidim understood that such a directive needed to be followed to the letter, even when it seemed unnecessary. On one occasion, in response to a request for a *bracha*, the Rebbe instructed for that person’s tefillin to be checked. This individual didn’t own tefillin at all, so a new pair was purchased. Hearing about the Rebbe’s directive, someone suggested

that the new pair be specifically checked, as well. To the *sofer’s* shock and amazement, he discovered that the *parshiyos* had been inserted incorrectly.

Often, the problems in the tefillin or mezuzos were found in unconventional places, such as in their placement on the door. In some cases, the Rebbe included in his instructions, to check the mezuzos “*vofen kviusam*—the manner of their placement...”

why tefillin? why mezuzah?

Each time the Rebbe announced a new campaign, there was a certain group of naysayers that automatically opposed it, often making quite shocking statements to back up their position. Sometimes, the Rebbe would respond and explain why specifically the *mitvza* at hand was indeed so important.

During the farbrengen of 13 Tishrei 5737*, the Rebbe spoke about all the different *mitvzoim* and addressed opponents to *Mitvza Mezuzah*, explaining why tefillin and mezuzos were so important, and how they were actually connected to each other and to other *mitvzoim*.

After all, the Rebbe explained, all *mitzvos* are based on a foundation of a dedication to Hashem, and that is the very theme of tefillin.


“Tefillin is associated with *shibud halev vehamoach*, dedicating one’s heart and mind to Hashem; it is a central part of the *mitzvah*. And while tefillin addresses that concept internally, regarding the body and soul of the individual, it is addressed in a more broader sense through the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah*. When we fulfill the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah*, we are told that ‘Hashem will protect your goings and comings forever; that Hashem will protect all those in the home and

everything in the home — ensuring that they fulfill Hashem’s will.

“Don’t be embarrassed by the *leitzanei hador* who deride *Mitvza Mezuzah*. Recently, one of them expressed himself by saying, ‘What will thousands of mezuzos accomplish exactly?’ Our response is, ‘*lo meihem, velo meihamonam*’ (we will have absolutely nothing to do with them). We follow the dictates of *Shulchan Aruch*, which rules that if a home has even a single *mezuzah*, it channels the blessing of long life for the inhabitants and their children. This ruling is unique, because the *Mechaber* doesn’t normally write reasons for rulings. So, essentially, this is a *halacha* itself — that a single *mezuzah* is a blessing for long life.

“How is it possible for a *Yid*, who knows about the *Shulchan Aruch*... to make such statements, and moreover, to claim that he heard so from his leader; it is a case of ‘*rabam dakru*—they stabbed their teacher...’ In fact, the reason is simple. The *mezuzah* in his own home is not kosher, and therefore he lacks Hashem’s spiritual protection... Because there is a non-kosher *mezuzah*, he was able to stumble in a *mezuzah*-related issue...”²⁰

The importance of kosher tefillin wasn’t just relevant to tefillin-related matters but to all matters of serving Hashem.

When a certain *rosh yeshiva* developed a habit to inexplicably oppose any *mitvza* that came out of 770, the Rebbe said publicly at a farbrengen that he came to the conclusion that the individual davens in *possule* tefillin. His lack of *shibud halev vehamoach* was the only possible explanation for the incessant opposition to matters of pure Torah and *mitzvos*, and it was necessary to say so publicly, the Rebbe said, to ensure that his words didn’t weaken the efforts.²¹ 

*  5737-1977

stories and maanos



the ben zachar

A Jew named Chalfon Na'im worked as a chef in Tomchei Temimim of Kiryat Gat. Chalfon and his wife were blessed with four daughters, and they desperately wanted a son. Mrs. Na'im would experience significant stress every time she went into labor; she felt that her entire family derided her for her large family of daughters. After her fourth birth, she fell into a severe depression.

When Rabbi Sholom Dovber Wolpo traveled to the Rebbe in the summer of 5740*, he wrote to the Rebbe about the situation.

The Rebbe instructed them to check their tefillin and to enhance their observance of *taharas hamishpacha*. To their shock, a full word — “*zachor es hayom hazeh*” — was missing from the tefillin.

New tefillin were purchased, and soon, Mrs. Na'im was expecting another child. Rabbi Wolpo photographed the tefillin and notified the local newspapers, who published a piece about the story. The article ended by saying, “The whole Kiryat Gat is waiting to see if she will have a girl or boy...”

One fine day several months later, Reb Chalfon telephoned Rabbi Wolpo to share the news of their new *ben zachar*, whom they decided to name Menachem Mendel. The newspapers were quick to report: “The Rebbe's ‘tikun’ helped; a baby boy was born!”

רגיל הנני עתה להציע לכמה מהפונים אלי בדהתפועהמ”ז

I am now accustomed to direct many of those who reach out to me to check their tefillin and mezuzos.



בדהמזוזהת”פ ככתוב בזה”ק שהמזוזות שומרות אפילו כשיוצאים מן הבית.

Check your mezuzos and tefillin, as the holy Zohar states, mezuzos protect you even when you leave your home.

ashkelon's miracle

Several years ago, Rabbi Leibel Rabinovitch and his wife, shluchim in Ashkelon, woke up to a frightening cry.

“Abba, Ima, I can’t walk...”

Their two-year-old daughter had suddenly lost control of her legs. They rushed to the hospital, but nothing in the battery of tests could pinpoint the problem.

Rabbi Rabinovitch quickly removed all his mezuzos and brought them to a *sofer*, while also writing a letter to the Ohel. The next day, as they sat with their daughter in the hospital, she suddenly hopped up, “I’m able to walk again!”

Everyone was shocked and the doctors were dumbfounded, but suddenly, Rabbi Rabinovitch’s phone rang. It was the *sofer* on the line.

“There was a slight problem in one mezuzah. The *veis* of *uvelechtech* was split, and I just corrected it. Your mezuzah is as good as new.”

Now it all made sense. Witnessing this open miracle, Rabbi Rabinovitch shared the story with friends and family, and soon a local journalist called to report the story.

Within a short time, the entire city was buzzing about the miraculous occurrence. Many people, including the entire staff of the newspaper, came to write letters to the Rebbe and have their mezuzos checked...

“I had not intended to publicize the story,” Rabbi Rabinovitch told *A Chassidisher Derher*, “but in the end, an entire city was lifted up by a story of the Rebbe’s miracle.”

For the full story, see *A Chassidisher Derher*, Nissan 5777.

how does he wear it?

In 5743*, a Torah scholar living in Monsey was involved in a terrible car accident, and the doctors predicted that he would never walk again. His Lubavitcher neighbor called *mazkirus* on his behalf, and was instructed to check his tefillin.

However, the injured fellow protested. "I just checked them several months ago!"

A follow up call brought a clarified directive: "Check how he *wears* the tefillin!"

The Lubavitcher was a bit embarrassed to bring up the issue with a devoutly *frum* person, but to his surprise, the Torah scholar turned white. "I can't believe it!"

The *sofer* had, for some reason, enlarged the size of his head-straps, causing the tefillin to fall down onto his forehead. The issue was immediately rectified, and one week later, he left the hospital a healthy man.²²

the challenge

Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Weiss was the respected rav of the Neve Achiezer neighborhood in Bnei Brak. In 5748*, he began to feel ill, and the doctors soon discovered a series of medical problems that were quite complicated to resolve.

Despite not being Lubavitcher Chassidim, one of his children faxed *mazkirus* and received the Rebbe's reply — "Check the tefillin and mezuzos."

Rabbi Weiss's tefillin were family heirlooms from before the Holocaust. Upon the advice of a *sofer*, he replaced the *battim* which were slowly degenerating, while retaining the *parshiyos* which were still in perfect condition.

However, his situation continued to deteriorate. His illness could not be treated with chemotherapy until his terribly swollen spleen was removed in surgery, which could not be conducted until the water was removed from his lungs. It was a very confusing and complicated situation, and he decided to write to the Rebbe once again.

Very quickly, they received a response. "Check the tefillin."

The family thought it was a mistake, and tried to ignore it. But after a few days of continued agony, his son 'conceded' and took the tefillin to a prominent *sofer*.

The *sofer* was in the middle of eating his dinner, and apologized, saying that he had a long line of customers waiting. But when the son explained the background to the story, the *sofer* suddenly changed his attitude. Seeing the chance to 'test' a miracle of the Lubavitcher Rebbe before his own eyes, he left his plate and enthusiastically headed into his study.

The miracle was quick in coming. As he pried open the tefillin, 30 letters tumbled out. Apparently, the old *parshiyos* had crumbled when being inserted into the new *batim*.

New *parshiyos* were purchased. Early the next morning, Reb Moshe Yaakov enthusiastically donned them to daven Shacharis, when a doctor approached them with a novel idea of treatment. The method proved successful, and over the next few months, he made a complete recovery.

That Shavuot, Reb Moshe Yaakov traveled to 770, where he drank in the Rebbe's *sichos* and received many *kiruvim* from the Rebbe. He became — by his own admission — an enthusiastic Chossid.²³

1. Yoma 11a.

2. Eiruvin 10:1.

3. Hilchos Tefillin 2:11.

4. Vayikra 25:29.

5. End of Parshas Bo.

6. Orach Chayim 39:10.

7. See the *nosei keilim* on Shulchan Aruch.

8. Citing the Mathe Efraim, 581:10.

9. *Veha'eir Eineinu Bisorasecha* pg. 287.

10. Igros Kodesh vol. 11 pg. 348.

11. Sefer Hasichos 5748 vol. 2 pg. 610.

12. 20 Av 5734. Sichos Kodesh pg. 377

13. Igros Kodesh vol. 1 pg. 185.

14. Igros Kodesh vol. 1 pg. 245-6.

15. Toras Menachem vol. 50 p. 433

16. For the full story of Mivtza Tefillin, see "Reconnecting," *Derher Iyar* 5777.

17. See *Leben Mitten Rebbe'n*, *Derher Tammuz*, 5776.

18. Shabbos Behar-Bechukosai 5734. Sichos Kodesh pg. 123.

19. See "*Ben Yud Gimmel L'Mitzvos*" for a collection of the Rebbe's *maanos* in this regard.

20. Sichos Kodesh 5737 vol. 1 pg. 73-4

21. Sichos Kodesh 5740, Erev Chag HaShavuot pg. 194.

22. Kfar Chabad issue 1713 pg. 56.

23. From the account of his son, Kfar Chabad Magazine.