

# IllumiNations

Issue 63 | Parshas Vayikra 5783  
Shnas Hakhel

CHABAD SHLUCHIM WORLDWIDE SHARE THEIR STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES.  DollarDaily.org

Dedicated to the Memory of Henya Federman - beloved and devoted Shlucha in the Virgin Islands

*Rabbi Shmuel and Sara Malka Weiss,  
Chabad of the Western Wall, Yerushalayim*

## Heinachta Tefillin Hayom?

By Chaya Chazan

*Our shlichus is very unique. We don't have a Chabad house; instead, all our activities are done outdoors. Our last expansion was a couple new folding chairs.*

After our initial meeting, we never see most of our "community" ever again. We're just yards away from the holiest site in the world - the Kotel Hamaaravi, the last remaining wall of the Beis Hamikdash.

Thousands of visitors come to the Kotel every day, to daven and connect with Hashem in this most special place. Many tourists come, searching for spirituality, but not really understanding what these giant rocks have to do with it. That's where we come in. I'm part of a dedicated team of shluchim who man the tefillin stand at the Kotel. We help people put a name to their vague wonderings, and guide them to a closer connection with Hashem.



The stand was opened in 1967, just after the Kotel was liberated during the Six Day War. Throughout the war, the Rebbe spoke often about the protective power of tefillin, and began a worldwide tefillin campaign that Chabad is still famous for that to this day. The Rebbe gave many specific instructions about the tefillin stand and how it should be run. It has been a permanent fixture at the Kotel ever since.

Although I'm a born and bred Mancunian, my wife's Israeli roots led to us living our kollel year in the Holy Land, after which we planned to search for shlichus. I volunteered at the Kotel stand often, and when they offered me a permanent position, we decided *this* would be our shlichus.

With a group of dedicated shluchim, we stand beside our booth from daybreak till dusk, in the winter's cold and the summer's heat, offering tefillin to IDF soldiers, tourists, Israelis, foreigners, young, and old; to Jews from every walk of life. On busy days, like weekdays during the summer, IDF induction ceremonies, Birthright trips, and during popular vacation times, we put tefillin on thousands of people per day.

Even on Shabbos, when we can't offer tefillin, we gather groups for Kabbalas Shabbos or Shacharis. We bring home all the guests we can find and introduce them to the beauty of a Yerushalmi Shabbos table. The stand is stocked with pamphlets in all languages, as per the Rebbe's specific direction.

"Heinachta tefillin hayom? Did you put on tefillin today?" This conversation started out like hundreds of others throughout our day. I'd approached a likely looking Israeli, holding out my tefillin to him.

"Yes, I put on tefillin today. In fact, I've put on tefillin every day for the last five years!" he answered, proudly. "Five years ago, I visited the Kotel. It was a swelteringly hot day. I saw you guys out of the corner of my eye. Of course, you came over to me and asked if I'd put on tefillin that day. You were sweating buckets, and looked tired and exhausted. I answered, *Yes, I did*, and you left me alone. But I lied. When I got home, I couldn't stop thinking about it. *Why did I lie to those guys?* I asked myself. *They're sitting out there, slaving away in the hot sun, all to help Jews like myself. I'd better live up to my lie.* I made up my mind, from that day forward, to put on tefillin every day."

We wrap tefillin on hundreds of arms each day, never knowing what influence it might have on each person's life. We were lucky enough to hear how this man had been impacted - by *not* putting on tefillin!

I was busy helping some young teenagers put on tefillin, when I saw an elderly man approach the plaza, watching me from a distance. I motioned to him to come on over, but he shook his head. When I finished with the boys, I went and introduced myself.

"I'm Herb," he said, shaking my hand.

"Are you Jewish?" I asked him.

"Yes. My mother and grandmother were Jewish," he replied.

"Wonderful! Come on over to the table and put on tefillin!" I invited him.

Herb was clearly hesitant, but started shuffling in that direction. He took a few steps, stopped and said, "I'm sorry. No. It's not for me." Hashem put the right words in my mouth, and Herb finally agreed to put them on.

"When's the last time you put on tefillin?" I asked him.

"Oh, not for a long time," he answered.

Herb went off to pray at the Kotel, and when he came back to return the tefillin, he admitted that it was actually the first time he'd ever worn them.

I asked him where he was from and what he did, and he began to share his life story with me. His parents immigrated to the U.S. from Vienna during World War II. On Rosh Hashanah, they wanted to go to shul, so they walked into the nearest synagogue.

"Where are your tickets?" the guard at the door asked them. They looked at each other in confusion.

"We don't have tickets," they answered.

"No tickets; no entry," the guard said, crossing his brawny arms.

Herb's parents left the synagogue, deeply disappointed and infuriated. "If this is Judaism in America, we don't want anything to do with it!" they declared. They raised

Herb without a shred of Judaism in his life. He was now a pastor for his church.

I helped Herb put on tefillin again the next day. I gave his information to his local shliach and asked him to send Herb some matza. Unfortunately, it's nearly impossible to keep up with the hundreds of people we meet each day, so I've lost track of Herb. I can only hope our short interaction sparked a yearning for Yiddishkeit in his life.

Many teenagers, when asked what their favorite part of their Birthright trip was, reply "the Kotel." I can only imagine that although they tour the length and breadth of our beautiful land, everything they see is relegated to ancient history. The Kotel, where they put on tefillin and daven with hundreds of other Jews from all walks of life, is where Yiddishkeit is alive and relevant.

One particular year, it was a busy Friday, with one Birthright group after another descending on the Kotel in droves. I was wrapping tefillin with one boy, and I called out over his shoulder to another young man to come over and put on tefillin as well. He shook his head and walked past me to the Kotel wall. A couple minutes later, I saw him exiting the plaza, and offered him a pair of tefillin once more. He refused, again. This happens all too often, and my usual response is something cheery and friendly, to leave them off with a positive impression. Something prompted me to tell this young man, "It's your loss." He moved off into the crowd and I immediately regretted my harsh words.

Although I obviously can't put tefillin on anyone on Shabbos, I often visit the Kotel on Shabbos mornings as well. Many tour groups visit on Shabbos mornings, and giving them all siddurim and saying a few short tefillos with them helps to make their visit meaningful.

That Shabbos morning, I greeted some groups that had just arrived, and handed siddurim to each of them. One young man approached me and asked, "Rabbi, do you remember me?" I had to shake my head and apologize. "You tried to put tefillin on me yesterday," he reminded me.

"Oh yes! Now I remember!"

"This has been a surreal experience. My name is Michael. I came on this Birthright trip, not knowing a stitch about Judaism. When we came to the Kotel, you approached me with these black leather strap things, and, honestly, it weirded me out. I went up to the wall and saw even more weird stuff! Some people were shaking back and forth,

some were pushing notes into the cracks, and some were talking - *to a wall!* It was all too weird! *Well, it's their loss, I said to myself. If they want to talk to some ancient wall, it's their loss.* I turned around and headed back to the plaza. Then *you told me, It's your loss.* It was like you'd been reading my mind.

"Our next stop on the tour was the shuk - the Israeli marketplace. It was really busy! There were two Chabad boys there, tefillin in hand. They asked me if I'd put on tefillin yet, and I knew I had to. Yesterday was the first time I'd ever put on tefillin."

Mark Levin, a famous Conservative talk show host, visited Israel for the historic opening of the American Embassy in Jerusalem. As part of his tour, he visited the Kotel.

He was immediately approached by my friend, Rabbi Hershel Gourarie, who asked him if he'd like to put on tefillin.

Mr. Levin looked embarrassed and tried to excuse himself. "I've never done it before," he admitted.

"Well, what better place to start than at the Kotel, the holiest site in the world?" Rabbi Gourarie promptly responded.

Needless to say, Mr. Levin agreed to put on tefillin.

Dovid is one of my "regulars." He comes to the stand every morning and helps me put tefillin on visiting soldiers, tourists, Israelis, policemen, and foreigners.

Dovid first visited the Kotel several years ago on a trip. He knew absolutely nothing about Yiddishkeit, Eretz Yisrael, or the Kotel. I saw him taking pictures - of the buildings across from the Kotel!

I introduced myself to him and faced him in the right direction - literally and spiritually. I explained the deep significance of the Kotel, and why we value it so dearly. I had no more time than that, as there were dozens more people waiting to put on tefillin.

I didn't know what a deep impression that little interaction would have on Dovid. His profound ignorance stung him so sharply, he was determined to learn as much as he could.

We kept in touch over the next months. Dovid asked me many deep and thought-provoking questions that demonstrated how seriously he was taking his educa-

tion. Five years later, he made aliyah and became fully frum. He has a beautiful, frum family. He truly turned around - in more ways than one!

There are a few of us who run the stand. We all speak Hebrew, of course, but each of us speaks another language as well, and deals with any visitors of the same lingual background.

We saw a young, American-looking boy pushing an elderly man in a wheelchair. Rabbi Chaim Goldstein, another dedicated shliach, walked over to them and struck up a conversation in Yiddish. He offered the elderly man his tefillin, but the man emphatically shook his head.

"The last time I put on tefillin was with my father and grandfather," he said, almost angrily. "They were fine, ehrliche Yidden. And what happened to them? G-d abandoned them in the flames of the Holocaust."

Rabbi Goldstein continued talking with him. Perhaps it was the conversation in "der mama lashon," but the elderly man softened considerably.

"I'm a good friend of Rabbi Cunin, in California," he boasted. "Tzedakah is a big mitzvah, no?" he asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

Grandfather and grandson continued on to the Kotel. They returned a quarter of an hour later, tears pouring down the old man's face.

"I want to put on tefillin," he said. "I want to show the Nazis how they failed! We're still here - in Yerushalayim, a Yiddishe land, with my fine, Yiddishe family." Saying so, he rolled up his sleeve, proudly awaiting the black leather straps.

**DollarDaily.org**

a Project of

**YadLShliach.org  
and COLlive.com**

**COL LIVE**

If you earn a monthly salary of \$3,000, contributing \$1 a day to help support the work of Chabad Shluchim around the world would only be equivalent to 1% of your monthly income. That's a small percentage to give to such a worthwhile cause, especially when you consider the impact it can have on the lives of others.

**Think about it: for just \$1 a day, you can help feed a hungry person, provide a shabbas meal, or bring a smile to a lonely elderly person's face.**

AND THE BEST PART? IT'S SO EASY TO DO.

**BY SETTING UP AN AUTOMATIC MONTHLY DONATION OF JUST \$32, YOU'LL BE PARTNERING WITH THE WORK OF CHABAD SHLUCHIM ACROSS THE GLOBE.**

And because it's on auto, you won't even have to think about it - it's a small gesture that can make a big difference.



**DollarDaily.org**

**HELP JEWS.  
ALL JEWS.  
IN ALL PLACES.**

**Don't let the fear of giving hold you back from doing something great.**