



BADERECH

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Yud Shvat

Reb Zushe Wilmowsky, zy'a, the legendary chasid, tireless builder and activist was affectionately referred to by the Lubavitcher Rebbe as '*mein partisan*'. During the war Reb Zushe escaped a Nazi labor camp and joined the Bielsky brothers, and was renown for his his physical and spiritual strength, spirit of determination and persistence. After the war upon arriving in Eretz Yisrael, Reb Zushe dedicated his life to fulfilling the Rebbe's directives. He was one of the founders of Kfar Chabad as well as dozens of other schools and yeshivot, spearheading countless programs to teach Torah and spread Yidishkeit throughout the land.

This coming week is *Yud (the 10th of) Shvat*, the date which marks both the yahrtzeit of Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak, the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, as well as the date upon which his holy son-in-law and successor, Rebbe Menachem Mendel, formally accepted the mantle of leadership. In advance of *Yud Shevat* 1970, a plane load of chasidim from Eretz Yisrael — among

them Reb Zushe Partisan — embarked on a journey to spend the special day in Crown Heights together with the Rebbe.

The El Al flight was a twelve hour *farbren-gen*, filled with raucous holy energy, the joyful sounds of singing and chasidim eagerly offering the stewards and other staff members the opportunity to lay tefillin. One after another, the male staff participated in *mitzvas tefillin*, each time bringing the joyful singing and ruach to a higher pitch. At one point the cockpit opened and the captain poked his head out to see what was going on. Naturally, a couple of shluchim spotted him and asked if he'd like to lay tefillin as well.

The noise in the cabin dropped to hushed whispers, and the demure pilot hesitated, "To be honest with you, I'm not a *ma'min*, I don't really believe in all these traditions and *mitzvos*. How can I do something that I don't believe in?"

Rav Dovid Chanzin, a seasoned Chabad shaliach and Chief Rabbi of Petach Tikvah, then approached the pilot and began to explain with patience and passion, the fundamentals of Emunah. 'While it may seem at times that we are disconnected from Hashem, there lies a reservoir of faith inherited from our forefathers

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deep within! Although that faith may be covered up and hidden, there is no such thing as a Jew who does not believe! The holy act of laying tefillin helps to uncover the light and activate the essence of the Yiddishe Neshama..."

Deeply moved by the genuine love and insight shared by the rabbi, the captain glanced back for a moment at his co-pilot now steering the plane, and then slowly stretched out his arm to lay tefillin for the first time in his life. With great emotion and tears in his eyes, the captain mouthed the words of the Shema and then a silent prayer. The cabin erupted into wild singing and dancing in the aisles.

As soon as the captain finished and removed the tefillin, Reb Zushe made his way over to him. Swinging a bottle of *mashkeh* in his hand, his voice boomed, "Mazal Tov! My name is Zushe Partisan. I am now from Kfar Chabad and during the war I fought as a partisan in the Russian forests. My dear brother, you must know... all of this world, all our strength and accomplishments mean nothing! The whole world is *hevel havalim* - empty and meaningless, none of it real and lasting. If there is something true in the world, however, one thing that is forever: a Jew who lays tefillin. Everything else? *Ze Klum*, it is nothing! *Gurnisht*, nothing, topped with more nothing! Now, dear brother," he beamed, raising his bottle and producing a plastic cup, "your putting on tefillin calls for a celebration — let's make a *l'chaim*!"

While the captain respectfully passed on the vodka while on duty, Reb Zushe was all too happy to drink both of their *l'chaims*.

Our sedra this week culminates with the Mitzvah of Tefillin:

וְהִיא לְאוֹת עַל־יָדך וְלִתְזֹופֶת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ כִּי בְּתַזְקָה יָד
הוֹצִיאנוּ הָמִצְרִים:

"And it shall be a sign upon your arm, and

for *totafos* between your eyes, for with a strong hand Hashem removed us from Egypt." (13:16)

Midrash (Mechilta) extrapolates an important halacha regarding the sequence of laying tefillin on our arms and heads: As long as we are wearing *tefillin shel yad* on our arm, *tefillin shel rosh* must to be worn on our heads. Thus, first we put on the tefillin shel yad, followed by the tefillin shel rosh. When removing our tefillin, first we take off the tefillin from our head and then the tefillin from our arm. The sages of the Midrash draw this teaching from the defining moment in history when we stood at Har Sinai and declared *Na'aseh v'nishma*, "We will do and we will understand." The covenantal relationship with Hashem forged at Matan Torah is based on our acceptance of the commandments and commitment to fulfil them as obligations, regardless of whether or not we understand them intellectually.

The practice of Yiddishkeit is based on first doing and then seeking premise, purpose or reasoning. Action precedes the asking of questions and intellectual understandings. Therefore, we first lay tefillin on our hand and arm, to represent the world of action and fulfillment, and only afterwards do we don head tefillin to represent our intellect and understanding. The foundation of *Na'aseh* must be in place before we can build the tower of authentic *nishma*.

Few mitzvos represent our tradition and activate our Jewish identity and pride as does laying tefillin. The Gemara (*Brachos*, 30b) describes an episode in which R' Yirmiyah was "excessively joyful". When his peer R' Zeira inquired as to why, R' Yirmiyah replied with wonder: *Ana tefillin manachna*, "I have put on tefillin!"

When we fulfil our parsha's directive and merit to physically manifest this special 'sign' expressing our deep faith in Hashem's love and strength... how could we not want to make a *l'chaim*?