



Parshat Bo - ADT Security (Always Don Tefillin)

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In 2003, I had one of the most memorable experiences of my entire life. I was in Israel accompanying a group of students on their 8th grade trip to Israel. I had decided earlier that year that the T'fillin (phylacteries) that I wore each day desperately needed to be replaced. I was still using the pair that I had been given for my Bar Mitzvah and they had never been checked to make sure that they remained Kosher (valid). I therefore made the decision that I was going to buy a new pair.

I could have gone online to find a pair, or walked into one of the Judaic stores at home to buy a pair, but instead decided that I would buy my pair in Israel.

I did some research prior to the trip to determine prices and quality. I decided that I would buy a pair of Tefillin known as Gasot. Gasot Tefillin are made slightly differently. The boxes are much stronger and do not wear (out) the way that Peshutim (simple) Tefillin do. Gasot Tefillin are much more costly than Peshutim Tefillin but last much longer. I had been saving for quite some time and determined that buying a pair of Gasot was an investment that will last for many years.

When I arrived in Israel, I went from store to store asking them if they carried Gasot. Store after store said no, and sent me to another store. It was nearing the end of my time in Jerusalem and I was getting a bit frantic. I went into a store in the Old City of Jerusalem and they told me of a scribe who owned a store in the Cardo (one of the old sections of Jerusalem that now contains a number of shops). I decided to try my luck one more time by going to that store.

I found the little shop at the end of the Cardo and went inside. I saw a man working behind the counter on a small scroll. He had a bright light and a magnifying glass and was hard at work. I took out my old pair of Tefillin and told him that I would like to check them to make sure that they were Kosher (valid). He told me that if he opened the Tefillin and found them to be un-Kosher that he would not be able to seal them again. I explained to him about my doubts that they would still be Kosher and that I wanted them to be opened. I told him that I was a teacher and that I would use the open pair to teach my students. I told him that I wanted a pair of Gasot. He asked me how much time I had.

We spent the next two hours selecting each piece of the Tefillin. He explained to me about the straps, how they were tied and how to pick a strong pair. He showed me the boxes and explained why some were "more solid" than others. We looked over each piece of parchment to make sure that there were no mistakes in the text. I watched as he rolled the parchment and placed them in each of the boxes. He walked me through the

process of sealing the Tefillin. The drilling of holes, the sewing of the stitches, the painting of the boxes. It was one of the most enlightening two hours of my life.

Yes, the Tefillin were costly. Each day, though, as I put on my Tefillin, I am reminded of those two hours. I am reminded of the process and the importance of what I am doing.

The scroll that is placed in the Tefillin contains the Shema. In the first paragraph of the Shema we are told to wear signs (on our arms and between our eyes) and to put a sign on the doorposts of our houses and the gates of our cities (a Mezuzah).

In this week's Parsha, Bo, we read the story of the 10th plague. Prior to the Angel of Death's arrival, God instructs Moshe to tell the Jewish people to slaughter a lamb and to use its blood to paint the doorposts of the house. This would be a sign to the Angel to "Pass-over" these houses.

Each night I try to spend 10-15 minutes teaching my sons about the Torah Portion. It is one of their favorite parts of the day (and truthfully, mine too). As I was retelling the story from this week (which is another command in this week's Parsha), I got to the plague of the death of the firstborn son. As my kids are getting older, I decided that I could tell them the story using "older" language. I did not need to tell them that the angel was going to "hurt" the Egyptian first-borns. Instead, I told them that they died. I explained that there was an angel who was sent to carry out this plague and asked my sons how the angel would know whose house was Jewish and whose house was Egyptian. The answer came out before I completed the question – "they had a Mezuzah on their doors!"

The Mezuzah was/is a protective force. It is a barrier that kept out the angel of death and helps to keep out evil from our homes. It is our security system.

As is any form of security, we want to make sure that it is of the highest quality. We want to test it to make sure that it works (that all of the parts are in working order). This is easy to do with an electronic alarm system, but a bit more difficult with a scroll in a box hanging from our door post.

Every three and a half years we should check our Mezuzah scrolls. We check that the parchment has not been destroyed and that the letters have not cracked.

If the Mezuzah is protection for our homes, the Tefillin is protection for our heart, our soul and our might (this explains why we wear the Tefillin on our muscle, facing our heart and on our head, where our thoughts put our soul to work). Just as we check our home security, we need to check our body and soul security. According to sources, however, this is only the case if you did not buy the Tefillin from a reputable source, or if something happened that may cause the Tefillin to become damaged (particularly by heat or water). Gasot Tefillin, bought from a trusted Tefillin authority need not be checked. Peshutim should be checked regularly (some say every year, some say every three and a half years).

As part of our school's Torah Dedication we have invited our Sofer, Zerach Greenfield to lead us in a Tefillin making workshop. It is an opportunity for those interested to help put together their own Tefillin (including the placement of parchment and sewing closed the

boxes). It is also an opportunity for all of us to bring in our Tefillin and Mezuzot that we feel need to be checked.

In the world in which we live, we all need added security. Take this opportunity to be part of the process of your protection (you don't even need to kill a lamb to be part of it).

AS A FAMILY:

- Attend the Tefillin making workshop with Rabbi Zerach Greenfield on January 31st at 5PM
- Have your Tefillin checked
- Have your Mezuzot checked (start by making sure that there is one on every doorpost)

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, TRY TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. How many plagues take place in this week's Parsha (hint, add the numeric value of the Hebrew letters that are the name of this week's Parsha)? What were they?
2. What holiday(s) were celebrated for the first time?
3. What is the first Hebrew month (hint, it's not Tishrei)?
4. How are we told to remember the Exodus?