

At the Crossroads

A young man in Israel, a Lubavitcher chasid, had a special love for outreach programs. One of his favorite activities was to go to a certain major highway junction every Friday and put *tefillin* on soldiers and other willing men waiting for the bus. He also gave out material related to Jewish laws to everyone who wished, as well as enjoying simply having a friendly chat with people.

Once, a small group of teenagers from a leftist kibbutz was standing not far from him at the crossroad. They gave out stickers with the word '*Shalom*' referring to peace treaties between Jews and Arabs and peace in general. The group consisted of two boys and three girls aged 14-16.

After a while a brand new car pulled up and stopped next to the group. The driver – a man in his twenties – got out of the car and asked the youngsters to put a '*Shalom*' sticker on the back of his car. They were of course happy to fulfil his request.

The Chabadnik saw that the car had stopped and that the driver was standing next to the car. He went up to the driver with a broad smile on his lips and said to him, "Brother! Come and put on *tefillin*!"

The driver turned to the Lubavitcher – a Yemenite with beard and long curled side-locks as is the custom of Yemenites – and scrutinized him with contempt. He replied dismissively, "Since when are we brothers?"

In order to sharpen his sting even more, he added: "We are not even of the same skin color!" And he adamantly refused to put on *tefillin*. The youngsters who had attached the sticker were now standing at a certain distance from the driver. The Chabadnik went up to them and told them the reaction of the driver, well knowing that young people in general look at the world without prejudice and usually look for justice. Their reaction, as expected, showed that they rejected the driver's behavior.

The driver noticed what was happening and that the youngsters were glancing at him. He went up to the Lubavitcher and said, "You want us to be brothers? No problem – I'm ready! Put a '*Shalom*' sticker on your car and we'll be brothers!"

"I agree," said the Lubavitcher. *I will put on a sticker on my car – and you will put on tefillin, and we will be brothers!*". "Certainly not!" said the driver.

“You’ll put on a sticker, and then we’ll be brothers...” The discussion went on for a short while until the driver finally got into his car, slammed the door and speedily left the place.

The youngsters remained at the crossroads looking quite uncomfortable. It seemed that they felt that the driver was not right and in fact had behaved in an insulting and unfair way to the Yemenite young man.

One of the kibbutz boys, aged around 15, asked the Lubavitcher, “Tell me, if we are willing to put on *tefillin*, are you willing to put on a “Shalom” sticker on your car?”

The Lubavitcher answered: “Sure – for anyone of you putting on *tefillin*, I’m willing to put on three “Shalom” stickers on my car!”

The boy was hesitant and did not really know what to do. At that very moment the van from their kibbutz stopped at the crossing in order to pick them up and drive them home. His friends hastily stepped into the van, but the boy said: “Look, the kibbutz van came to pick us up and I’ll have to go. But I promise to put on *tefillin* here at the crossroad next Friday.”

And before entering the van, he embraced the Lubavitcher and said **“Brothers forever!”**

His friends in the van saw and heard what was happening and immediately cheered and clapped their hands.

The following week the Lubavitcher planned to visit relatives who lived far away in Israel. The Sabbath started early at that time of year, but he felt that he had to go to the crossing at any price.

The following Friday afternoon he was standing there with his pair of *tefillin*. After a few minutes the kibbutz van appeared. A few youngsters stepped out, but not all of them been there last week. However, the boy who had promised to put on *tefillin* was among them.

The Lubavitcher went up to the boy after a while and asked him: “Do you remember that you promised to put on *tefillin*?”

“Yes, I do” he answered. “But to tell you the truth, I have no idea how you put them on. I have never put on *tefillin* in my life.”

“What?” chasid responded. “Don’t they arrange for Bar Mitzvahs on your kibbutz?”

“No”, was the reply. “In our kibbutz we don’t observe any of that stuff at all”.

“If that is the case: said the Lubavitcher young man, “let’s celebrate your Bar Mitzvah right here!” He trotted over to a nearby kiosk and bought cake and soda.

He put on *tefillin* with the kibbutz boy, who took the whole matter very seriously. His friends from the kibbutz participated in the Bar-Mitzvah party and had cake and soda.

A young man from that same kibbutz had become a *ba’al tshuva* and joined the Lubavitcher movement a few years before this event. When asked about the boy who celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at the crossing, he said that he know the family well. “They have very leftist views, but they are also very idealistic”, he remarked.

In subsequent months and years, the Chabadnik who had put *tefillin* on the boy was known to remark, “I wish I could say “*Sh’ma Yisrael*” on Yom Kippur with the same emotion that the boy from the kibbutz said it that day.”

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition in *Chassidic Gems II* by **Tuvia Litzman**.

*Connection:* Weekly reading of *Vayigash* continues the saga of Yosef and His **Brothers**.