

**Spiritual Armor: Unleashing the Protective Power of Tefillin**  
**By Rabbi Aaron Krupnick**  
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This morning I want to speak about the tremendous power of tefillin to protect us from some of the greatest challenges that will come our way. I want you to learn how tefillin can provide us with the strength, the courage to stand up to these situations both physically and spiritually, facing up to what may sometimes seem like overwhelming opposition. The mitzvah of tefillin enables us to remain steady, with a clear mind, feeling in control and on top of the situation - any situation that comes our way; and today I want to tell you how.

In a difficult or life threatening situation, fear and panic may take over. In an overwhelming spiritual trial it can be easy to feel weak, unable to confront the seemingly overpowering enemy. The mitzvah of tefillin puts things into perspective, providing us with the power to take on any difficulty we're faced with and come out on top. Tefillin enable us to be protected from the powerful influences around us, allowing us to stand firm and unyielding - against all odds. It connects us in the deepest way to Gd and, to the extent that just as nothing can stand up against Gd the Almighty, so too nothing can stand up to us with this profound connection to Gd's power that's represented by tefillin.

Tefillin have been around, and used as a source of power, for at least 3000 years. Archaeologists have found ancient tefillin that look a lot like ours. They weren't square, but they had the same four sections of Torah all rolled up into one container for the arm, and four separate pieces for the head that we have. What are the 4 sections of Torah in tefillin? They are the four times that the command to wear tefillin is given in our Holy Scriptures. The first, and perhaps most important reference to tefillin seemingly comes out of nowhere. The Jewish People have suffered 210 years of backbreaking slavery. Life has beaten them up; almost, almost broken them and then finally, Gd takes them out of Egypt. They see the 9 plagues done on their behalf and then they are told to get ready to leave Egypt. They are told to get ready, to have the first seder, to pack their bags and get ready to walk out. It is the 14th of Nisan, which is always a full moon. The 10th plague starts and the Egyptians suffer, and then comes the most

important moment - a moment that could go either way. Gd says to them - "Get up and Go- with a mighty, outstretched, arm I will take you out of Egypt." But can they go? Do they have the courage to stand up for themselves and walk out? Or, is the fear of what will happen when the Egyptians catch up going to keep them cowering in fear in their homes???? And in an act of Holy Chutzpah, they get up and they march out, not under cover of darkness, but in the bright light. They stand up for themselves. They hold their heads high and they walk away from the slavery that had held them down for so long. And at that very moment, right there at the end of Parshat Bo, out of the blue Gd says, "And it shall be a assign upon your hand, and a symbol on your forehead that with a mighty hand the Lord freed us from Egypt." (Ex. 13:16.)

What's the connection, the connection between leaving Egypt and wearing the tefillin? What's that command doing there? It has nothing to do with the Seder or how we celebrate Pesach?! What's the connection? The connection is the Holy Chutzpah. You know what Chutzpah is? It is nerve, it is audacity. Sometimes the word can be used in a negative sense: A person who has chutzpah can be rude, thinking only about himself, imposing on others. That's bad! But there can also be Holy Chutzpah - the nerve, the audacity, the courage to stand up and speak up for your self - and that's very good! Gd wanted the Jewish People - and Gd wants us all now, to have Holy Chutzpah! To stand up for ourselves and who we are. Back in Egypt, the Jewish People had the tar kicked out of them on a regular basis, so much so that they almost forgot who they were, what they stood for as individuals and as families. They saw themselves only as their masters saw them. They defined themselves based on others. If the master was happy they were happy. If the master thought it was important, they thought it was important. They lived to make the masters happy. But with a strong, outstretched arm, Gd reached inside their hearts and pulled them up. Gd said, "I made you, not them! I know who you really are on the inside. You don't have to define who you are based on them, on others. You can stand on your own two feet, shoulders back and proud because Gd made you special and holy and more powerful than you think. You are not defined by your circumstance, by what happened to you, but by the strength you have on the inside!!! Now go out there and make something of your life!" And they did, and

that's when Gd tells them to always remember this by putting on tefillin.

That same outstretched arm, Gd's arm, becomes your arm when you put on the tefillin. It is a potent reminder of the fact that, at the beginning of everyday, you define who you are - what you stand for, what matters most. No one else can do that for you, and no one else has the power to make you someone you do not want to be. Gd's power is in you. If Gd could transform the lives of those beaten down slaves, then that same power, that same self confidence, that same strength of character can be awoken in you, too! You strap that power onto your arm and Gd reaches into your heart and pulls you up, too. If you are a kid in school - you don't need to be defined by peer pressure. You don't need to make the other kids happy to be happy inside. You are stronger than that! As adults, we don't need to live in fear of what others will think about us, either. We need to define who we are, who Gd wants us to be and have the courage to live that. And as we get older we don't need to live in fear for our health, it is the health of our character and self-concept that will make us stay strong, even if, for some reason the body gets weak. Gd can reach into weak bodies and make them stronger, too. We have to have the Holy Chutzpah to live our core values and be who Gd wants us to be, not what the rest of the world expects of us. People respect people who stand for something, who stand up for what they believe in! People respect others who are principled, who have a strong sense of personal integrity, who have inner strength of character. Our arms are girded with strength and renewal every time we put those tefillin on our arms. That's Power!

But of course we don't just put tefillin on our arms, we wear them on our heads, too. Why? To remind us that we have the mental power to conquer our Yetzer Ha-Rah? The Yetzer Ha-Rah is the slave mentality that says: "Just take the easy way out. Why fight? Why struggle? Just make everyone else happy and you'll be happy." The tefillin surrounding our brain remind us that the way we think about our lives is the way we are going to live our lives. It starts up here! We can't always control what happens to us, but we can always control the way we think about it, the way we process, the way we react. That's ours to control and it starts with the way we look at and think about the world. When we put on the tefillin we are

reminded that Gd has put that tremendous power - the power to shape our worlds, inside our heads.

But there is more. I said that there is Bad Chutzpah and there is Holy Chutzpah. Bad Chutzpah is when you impose your will on others without thinking about theirs. Bad Chutzpah is when you are strong, but to be strong you need to make others feel weak. Bad Chutzpah is when you stand up for yourself at the expense of others. Holy Chutzpah is when you stand up for yourself and you *empower* others. Holy Chutzpah is when you live your values and you respect the fact that other have the right to do the same. Holy Chutzpah is when you HELP them to do the same. And we put the tefillin on our heads to remind us that there is more than enough power, more than enough blessing to go around. Many people think that for me to feel strong, I need to make you feel weak - for me to win, you need to lose; that for me to be honored people must think less of others. After all, there can only be one best, one favorite, one person in charge. NO. A person who walks with the uplifting feeling of Gd's blessings, who lives with Gd's power coursing through their veins, understands that there is plenty for everyone and that if I can help you to be the best *you*, that only makes *me* stronger. Helping another to be the best he or she can be brings out the best in me. I don't have less by giving; by empowering others, I have more. People will not think less of me because I help to empower others - they will think more of me. Why is that? Because they will see the confidence and integrity in me as I help to bring it out in others. Ultimately people don't simply respect people who stand for something alone - they respect people who stand for something and who help others to be able to stand strong on their own two feet as well. It takes a certain amount of Holy Chutzpah to live you life that way. Tefillin reminds you that you can do it!

You cannot control what happens to you. You cannot control what others may say or think about you. No, you need to run *your* race. You need to be the person you know deep down inside Gd intended you to be. And that takes courage. But when you put on the tefillin, and you open your heart, you can feel Gd empowering you, strengthening you, bringing out the best in you. If He did it for a bunch of slaves, He can do it for you. You can think about your life, you can live your life, in a whole new way when you understand the

power that comes from those boxes. How you start your day - what you think about, your plan of action - that is set early on, and so even if you only put them on for a moment or two, you are reminding yourself Who is in control, what matters most, and what you can do with Gd's help. We all have wellsprings of courage inside of us, untapped resources of power. It's us to us to tap into them, and then to go out and to help others to do the same. That's what it means to be truly powerful and truly free. That's what it means to be a Jew!