

# YOU CAN'T PASS THE BUCK

*Many people would be happy to delegate Mitzvos, like Tefillin, Shabbos and Yom Kippur. Still, we are told to do them ourselves. Because, just as in your own business, "nobody is going to do the dirty work for you." How does that apply to Jewish education?*

## **Can You Delegate Tefillin?**

Over the past months, there has been a lot of discussion regarding a proposed defense deal between Israel and the United States. Much has already been written about the topic, and I don't plan on taking a side. One thing is clear to all parties: that when Israel will need to defend itself, the United States may help out in all sorts of ways, but at the end of the day, the Israeli soldiers will be the ones defending the country. Because nobody does the dirty work for you...

Our mitzvos are categorized in many different ways. The most famous categorization is positive and negative commandments (though "prohibitions" would be more appropriate, for no mitzvah is actually negative. It's more like mitzvos to do and mitzvos not to do).

Mitzvos are also labeled as "mitzvos between man and G-d," and "Mitzvos between man and man." Some mitzvos can only be observed in Israel and others must be kept everywhere.

Some mitzvos are only for men and some are only for woman.

The least famous categories are mitzvos that can be passed on to others and mitzvos that you must do yourself.

For example, a house must have a mezuzah but it doesn't matter who puts it up. The homeowner can hire the Rabbi to put up his mezuzahs and the mitzvah is done. Or a little town Jew who has to say kaddish for his father but doesn't have a minyan can hire a big city Jew to say kaddish in his stead.

Then there are mitzvos no one can do for you. Nobody can eat matzo for you on Pesach even if you have a toothache. No one can wear Tefillin for you even if you broke your arm. Actually many people have been willing to pay me to put on Tefillin for them and it would be a rather profitable business but this is not one of those mitzvos that can be passed on.

Another example: we are all in shul now, why? We are here today to repent for our sins of the past year. This is also something that no one can do for you. Although many people are more than willing to pound on other people's chest for them, pointing out all of their iniquities and shortcomings, this is not one of those mitzvos. You must do Teshuvah yourself. No one can do it for you. Sure, when you have to apologize to another person a bouquet of flowers or an expensive pen will do. But G-d expects to see you in person, pounding on your chest, regretting ever ignoring His needs. The same applies to the prayers. Could you hire me to say the long Yom Kippur prayers for you? It would be a whole lot easier if everyone could just send me an email with a list of the things they'll need in the

coming year; more clients, a rise in stock value and lower blood pressure, along with a note from the boss that they have to work, and I would stand here alone all the lists and pray for each you. Not a bad idea, but my friends, G-d wants to hear the prayers from your mouths.

## **The Dirty Work**

Why is it so?

Every business owner knows that nobody does the dirty work for you. You can hire a hundred workers but if you're not there to make sure that everything gets done according to your standards '*it ain't gonna happen*'. People can do technical work for you but the important stuff, like how to improve the business or how to develop your clientele; these things you have to do by yourself. Because at the end of the day, it's not their business (pardon the pun).

The same applies at home as well. Every woman knows that she can hire the best cleaning lady but if she wants her home to be clean the way *she* likes it, she'll have to clean it herself.

Rashi points out this same idea in today's Torah reading. Today we read how Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away, into the desert. They soon run out of food and water and Ishmael collapses. Not wanting to see her son die Hagar places him under some desert brush, moves a few yards off and cries out to G-d. The verse then says, "and G-d heard the boy's cries." Rashi explains that the prayers of the sick person are more effective than other people's prayers on his behalf and they are accepted faster. Again you see that when something is

important to you, you have to take care of it yourself. This is why Mitzvos, which are key components in your connection to G-d must be done by you. You can't hire someone to take care of that connection for you.

## **You Are The Best Influence**

In light of the above, let me point out that the most important thing in our lives right now is the Jewish education of our children. G-d has entrusted us with the most precious merchandise, Jewish children, and He is depending on us to raise them to be competent partners for Him in the creation of the world.

What do most of us do to this end? We do as our parents did. We send our kids to Hebrew School and we feel that we've done our part. And those of us who send our children to Jewish day schools and pay thousands of dollars in tuition every year, well, we feel that we've gone 'beyond the letter of the law' and that the schools will take care of the kids' Judaism for us. And when it's time for the kids to go to college we make sure to send them only to a campus that has a Hillel or Chabad house so that they could take care of the Judaism for the year.

Some parents even send their teenagers on a birthright trip to Israel and hope that in Israel the kids will have a 'Jewish awakening'.

My friends, Bar Mitzvah tutors, trips to Israel, Jewish day camps and Sunday schools are all very important. Still, the bottom line is that no one will get the job done the way you can. The hired help can teach your children Torah, history and how to pray. But

the “Yiddishkeit”, the love of Judaism can only come from the home, from you.

Ultimately, there is no one in the world that has as great an influence on the child than his own parents. The key to the future of your child’s Yiddishkeit is in your hands.