

JEWELS IN THE STEETS

It was 9:30 one night in 1943, during the lifetime of the Previous Rebbe. The daily study program at 770 had just concluded, and Rabbi Hershel Fogelman and several of his fellow students were standing in the hallway, discussing the subject which they had been reviewing. Suddenly, a young man burst through the main door. He was not wearing a yarmulka and appeared very agitated.

"Where's the Rabbi?" he called out. "I must speak to the Rabbi!"

Rabbi Fogelman went over to the young man and calmed him, while one of the other students went and brought a yarmulka. The stranger's name was Herbert Goldstein. His brothers had just called him from Boston, informing him that one of their relatives was very ill, and asking him to go to the Lubavitcher Rebbe at once to seek a blessing. Rabbi Fogelman requested him to wait while he asked Rabbi Eliyahu Simpson (the Previous Rebbe's secretary) if it was possible for the Rebbe to receive the young man.

Rabbi Simpson said he would ask the Rebbe shortly, and Rabbi Fogelman returned to Herbert. By this time, the young man had collected himself, and opened up to Rabbi Fogelman. He lived at the Hotel Mayflower in New York, organizing commercial receptions. He and his brothers had seen the Rebbe three years ago. At that time, he had been an alcoholic. The Previous Rebbe had taken his hand in his own, and spoken to him reassuringly, encouraging him to control himself and refrain from drinking. And it had worked! From that moment onward, Herbert had been able to bridle his desire to drink. Every night, he said, he would kiss the hand which the Previous Rebbe had held.

Rabbi Simpson came back and told Herbert he would be able to see the Rebbe shortly. Herbert continued talking to Rabbi Fogelman until the time came for the yechidus. When Herbert emerged from the Rebbe's room, he was brimming with excitement: The Rebbe had remembered him! He told him exactly where he had stood during their meeting three years earlier, and where Herbert's brothers had stood. He had also given him a blessing for the recovery of his relative, and spoken to him about the importance of putting on tefillin every day.

Rabbi Fogelman and Herbert parted warmly. Shortly afterwards, the Ramash - that's the way the Chassidim would refer to our Rebbe during the lifetime of the Previous Rebbe - and Rabbi Simpson came over to Rabbi Fogelman and asked about Herbert's story. There was no hesitation on the part of the Ramash. He did not want Herbert's inspiration to remain in the clouds, but rather to be connected to actual deeds.

He told Rabbi Fogelman to take a pair of tefillin from Rabbi Simpson, go to the Hotel Mayflower the next morning, and put on tefillin with Herbert. Rabbi Fogelman was then to give Herbert the tefillin, though it would be preferable if he paid for them. Rabbi Fogelman did as he was told, and Herbert was happy to see him. "It was smart of the Rebbe to send you while I'm still enthused," he smiled, as he willingly donned the tefillin.

When Rabbi Fogelman came back to 770, he informed Rabbi Simpson (and the Ramash, for the two worked so closely together that by informing Rabbi Simpson, you would automatically be informing the Ramash) of the episode. He was told to go back and pay Herbert another visit the following morning. Herbert was glad to see Rabbi Fogelman again: "You'll never believe what happened this morning," he told him. "When I woke up, I remembered that as a child my parents had told me to say Modeh Ani upon arising and so that's what I did!" He put on the tefillin a second time and paid for them, promising to put them on every day. Rabbi Fogelman was sent to see Herbert a third time, and the young man reiterated his promise to observe the mitzvah.

"Today," Rabbi Fogelman explained, "it's hard to appreciate how big a step it was in those days for a non-observant American to begin putting on tefillin daily. When the Rebbe saw that such a thing was possible, he refused to let the opportunity pass."

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