

*The Kushner International Tefillin Bank* is an organization proposing to hand over *tefillin* as gifts to any individual committed to using them, anywhere in the world. No campaign, with its scope and expense, has ever been undertaken in Jewish history.

In its opening months The Bank has already dispersed over 1500 pairs of tefillin in 28 countries. It's made obtaining the tefillin easy, processing requests through their website while maintaining links with thousands of synagogues and *Chabad Houses* worldwide.

"The prospect is huge but entirely realistic," Founder of The Bank, Rabbi Shalom Lipskar says. "The impact it could have on Jewish life is nothing short of revolutionary."

Tefillin are leather boxes containing biblical verses, handcrafted according to ancient specifications. Traditionally, Jewish males strap the boxes to the head and arm during prayer, a symbol of their intellectual and emotional devotion to G-d. Because of the meticulous manufacturing process, tefillin generally range from 350 US dollars upwards.

Recipients of The Bank tend to be those without the means to purchase their own pair, though the only real stipulation is a sincere commitment to use them daily, as biblically required. Demand for tefillin crosses the demographical spectrum - from college students through the *Chabad* campus network, to prison inmates and their children through *The Aleph Institute*.

After arranging a pair of tefillin for a local inmate (who prefers anonymity), Rabbi Simon of Delmar, New York received a letter of thanks describing the ritual's impact. "Being incarcerated, it's often difficult to feel close to G-d," the letter read, "but this precious gift has enhanced my spiritual experience. It has been another step in my aspirations toward change."

Along with the multitude of organizations involved in sending gifts to American soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Tefillin Bank has shipped several pairs of tefillin to Jewish individuals currently deployed. Major Jeffery Yarvis, stationed at Camp Victory,

Iraq claims the tefillin that he and other soldiers now put on in their spare moments have boosted morale, among both Jews and Non-Jews in the camp.

“Prayer becomes a more vital element in your life out here - among everyone; regardless of your religion,” Yarvis explains. “Feeling connected to G-d is one of my coping mechanisms and the Tefillin are daily reminders.”

A Chabad project, The Bank is an extension of *The Lubavitcher Rebbe*, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson’s emphasis on the transcendent value of tefillin. In 1967 he launched a campaign to increase tefillin awareness, urging his followers to offer the use of tefillin to students on campus, businessmen on the street, and soldiers in the Israeli Army then in the midst of a crucial war.

Initial funding for the The Bank came from Yaakov and Chaim Weinbaum, holocaust survivors dedicated to the continuation of the traditions they saw nearly destroyed. The importance of the project was recognized by the Kushner Foundation, expanding funding into other areas of Jewish tradition such as the similarly structured *Mezuzah Bank*, and pledging ongoing support.