



## “So that Hashem’s Torah may be in your mouth” Tefillin Shel Yad Relate to Akeidas Yitzchak Tefillin Shel Rosh Relate to Yaakov Avinu

This week, we read parshas Bo. Toward the end of the parsha, we find the mitzvah of donning tefillin shel yad and tefillin shel rosh. It is mentioned for the first time in the Torah in the passage of “קדש לי כל בכור”. Here is the pertinent passuk (Shemos 13, 9): “והיה לך לאות על ירך ולזכרון בין עיניך למען תהיה תורת ה' ממצרים” —and it will be for you a sign on your hand and for a remembrance between your eyes, so that Hashem’s Torah may be in your mouth, for with a strong hand Hashem took you out of Egypt. With immense joy and pleasure, we will focus on several essential aspects related to this vital mitzvah:

1. In this passuk, HKB”H provides the rationale for donning tefillin: “So that Hashem’s Torah may be in your mouth.” In the Gemara (Kiddushin 35a), our blessed sages deduce from this passuk that “the entire Torah is compared to tefillin.” We will endeavor to explain the deeper connection between the mitzvah of tefillin and the entire Torah.

2. Elsewhere in the Gemara (Menachos 36b), our sages expound on several pesukim and conclude that tefillin shel yad are to be donned on the left arm rather than on the right arm. This is clearly a deviation from the norm, since, as a rule, the right side is considered more important and takes preference over the left side, as explained in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 206, 4): “כל דבר שמברך עליו לאכלו או להריח בו צריך לאוחזו בימינו כשהוא מברך—anything that a berachah is recited over it, to eat

it or smell it, requires holding it in the right hand when reciting the berachah. In a similar vein, the Pri Megadim (ibid. 6) writes in the name of the Sefer Chassidim (109): If someone says to his friend, “Give me a sefer,” he should take it with his right hand and not with his left, since the Torah was given with the right (hand), as it says (Devarim 34, 3): “From His right hand, He presented a fire of law to them.” Then, the Pri Megadim adds: And this most certainly applies to every other mitzvah; everything is done with the right. So, since we have a general rule that mitzvos should be performed with the right hand, why did HKB”H command us to deviate from this rule by donning the tefillin on the left hand rather than on the preferred right hand?

3. Additionally, we learn in the Gemara (Menachos 36a), that there is a specific order in which the tefillin shel yad and shel rosh are to be donned: “כשהוא מניח, מניח של יד ואחר כך מניח של ראש, דכתיב וקשרתם לאות על ירך, והדר והיו לטוטפות בין עיניך.” When he puts them on, he puts on the “shel yad” first and then puts on the “shel rosh”; for, it is written (ibid. 6, 8): “And bind them as a sign upon your arm,” and subsequently: “and let them be totafos (tefillin) between your eyes.” It behooves us to explain why HKB”H insisted that we don the tefillin “shel yad” prior to the “shel rosh.”

4. Chazal learned in the Gemara (ibid. 34b) that the tefillin “shel yad” are to be housed in a single compartment,

into which we place four passages. The housing of the “shel rosh,” on the other hand, is to be divided into four compartments, with each containing its own respective passage. This, indeed, is how the halachah appears in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 32, 38). Hence, we will endeavor to explain the rationale for these differences.

### The Key to Understanding the Mitzvah of Tefillin is the Passuk: “They shall make Me a Mikdash, so that I may dwell among them”

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a statement in the Zohar hakadosh (Midrash HaNe’elam, Chayei Sara 129a) attributed to Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimon. When he was performing the mitzvah of tefillin, he said: **“Praiseworthy is the man who dons tefillin and is aware of the reason.”** His colleagues informed him that they had heard from his father, Rashbi, that the secret of the tefillin is concealed in the passuk (Shemos 25, 8): **“ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם”—they shall make Me a Mikdash, so that I may dwell among them.** In the sefer Mitzvas Tefillin (Chapter 1, 4), the Shela hakadosh explains that Rashbi is teaching us that in the merit of performing the mitzvah of tefillin, HKB”H rests His Shechinah among Yisrael, just as he did in the Beis HaMikdash. Therefore, he writes (ibid. 3, 5) that it is proper to don tefillin prior to reciting the passages of the korbanos, since the tefillin are a substitute for the Beis HaMikdash, where the korbanos were offered.

Rabbi Chaim Vital in the sefer Eitz HaDa’as Tov (Terumah) and the Megaleh Amukos (Kedoshim) explain how the mitzvah is alluded to by the passuk: **“ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם.”** They refer to the teaching in the Gemara (ibid. 35a): **תנא: “יתנא: That tefillin must be square is a halachah transmitted to Moshe at Sinai.** This then is the “remez”—allusion—found in the passuk: **“They shall make Me a Mikdash, so that I may dwell”** בתוכם.” The word בתוכם is interpreted as בתוך—implying that the Shechinah dwells within the tefillin that are shaped like the square final **“mem”**-- ם . To make sense of this, we must explain the connection between the mitzvah of tefillin and the mitzvah to build a Beis HaMikdash.

### The Fantastic Connection between Tefillin “Shel Yad” and Akeidas Yitzchak

I would like to propose a wonderful explanation based on a fascinating concept presented in the Zohar hakadosh (Raiya Mehemna, Ki Seitzei 282b) concerning the tefillin “shel yad”: **“קשורה דתפלה דינ דומיא דעקדה דיצחק”**—the binding of (or the knot of) the tefillin “shel yad” resembles “Akeidas Yitzchak.” At the Akeidah, Avraham Avinu bound Yitzchak and placed him atop the mizbeiach, as it is written (Bereishis 22, 9): **“ויעקוד את יצחק בנו”**—**he bound Yitzchak, his son.** The Midrash Tanchuma explains (Vayeira 23): **When he (Avraham) came to slaughter him, he (Yitzchak) said to him, “Father, tie my hands and feet.”**

To elaborate on the seemingly remote connection between donning tefillin and Akeidas Yitzchak, we will refer to another teaching in the Zohar (Pekudei 257a). We learn that the purpose of the Akeidah was to subdue and mitigate the “midas hadin” of Yitzchak—which is a left-sided midah—beneath the “midas hachessed” of Avraham—which is a right-sided midah. In the words of the Zohar hakadosh (Bereishis 23a): **The right hand is from the aspect of “chesed; the left hand is from the aspect of “gevurah.”** Thus, Avraham Avinu, the personification of “midas hachessed,” represents the right hand, whereas Yitzchak Avinu, the personification of “midas hadin,” represents the left hand. So, by binding Yitzchak, Avraham subdued the left-handed “midas hadin” beneath the right-handed “midas hachessed.”

This illuminates for us the enigmatic statement of the Zohar hakadosh that the binding of the tefillin “shel yad” resembles Akeidas Yitzchak. For, when we don the tefillin “shel yad,” the right hand binds the tefillin “shel yad” around the left arm. This is precisely what happened at the Akeidah; Avraham Avinu, representing the right hand, bound Yitzchak Avinu, representing the left hand.

### The Tefillin Are Donned with the Right Hand to Sweeten the “Din” of the Left Hand

We can now begin to reconcile the command to put the tefillin “shel yad” on the left hand rather than on the more prestigious right hand. For, it is precisely due to its superior

status as the representative of “midas hachessed” that the right hand is used to bind the left hand—thereby symbolically constraining the stringent “midas hadin” under the control of the benevolent “midas hachessed.”

In this manner, I would like to propose an explanation for what the michaber (author of the Shulchan Aruch) writes concerning the tefillin “shel yad” (O.C. 27, 8): **It is the accepted custom to bind (the strap of the tefillin) around the forearm six or seven times.** The Magen Avraham (ibid. 13) writes in the name of the Arizal and Shela that the actual minhag is to wrap the strap of the “shel yad” around the forearm seven times. To explain the significance of these seven wraps, it is known that HKB”H manages the world with seven midos: **Chesed, gevurah, Tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod and malchus.** They correspond to the seven days of creation.

Let us now present a related “remez” found in the Ohev Yisrael (Vayeira) related to Avimelech’s remark to Avraham (ibid. 21, 23): **”ועתה השבעה לי באלקים הנה”—now swear to me here by G-d. Avimelech alludes to HKB”H, who is אבי-מלך—my Father, the King.** He says to Avraham, whose midah is “chesed”: “. . . ועתה השבעה לי”, **the term “השבעה” is related to the word “שבעה” (meaning seven). Thus, He is telling Avraham that all seven, holy midos should be managed (modified) by your midah, “midas hachessed,” to sweeten the “dinim” associated with the name Elokim, and that all seven midos should contain an aspect of “rachamim” (divine mercy) and “chesed” (divine kindness).**

### The Tefillin “Shel Rosh” Correspond to Yaakov Avinu

Thus far, we have clarified the relationship between the donning of tefillin “shel yad” and the binding of Yitzchak by Avraham—the binding of the left by the right. Now, it behooves us to consider who the tefillin “shel rosh” represent. We find an extremely valuable, intriguing insight in the sefer Sodei Razya, authored by one of our early commentaries, the author of the Rokeiach. He asserts that the tefillin “shel rosh” correspond to Yaakov Avinu. Here is a translation of his sacred words:

**Why is there a “shin” on the housing of the tefillin “shel rosh”? Because it represents Yaakov, as it is written**

(Yeshayah 49, 3): **“Yisrael, in whom I take glory (אתפאר),” and tefillin are called “פאר” (magnificence, majesty), as it says (Yechezkel 24, 17): “Don your majesty (“פאר”).” At the time of the churban, He threw them down to earth, as it is written (Eichah 2, 1): “He cast down from heaven to earth the glory (תפארת) of Yisrael.” Therefore, on Tisha B’Av, we place ashes on the site of the tefillin. And regarding the times of the Mashiach it says (Yeshayah 61, 3): “To give them ‘פאר’ in place of ashes.”**

We can now appreciate the order of the donning of the tefillin. The tefillin “shel yad” precede the tefillin “shel rosh” to reflect the order of the holy Avos—Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. First, we perform the mitzvah of tefillin “shel yad” by using the right hand to bind the left arm. As explained, this alludes to **Avraham**, who bound **Yitzchak**, to sweeten and modify the latter’s “din” with the former’s “chesed.” Next, we don the tefillin “shel rosh” that correspond to **Yaakov**, whose midah is “Tiferes”—an amalgamation of Avraham’s “midas hachessed” and Yitzchak’s “midas hadin” that was mitigated by the Akeidah.

This explains magnificently the structure of the tefillin “shel rosh.” A strap emerges from each side of its housing—one from the right and one from the left—because Yaakov’s “Tiferes” is comprised of both right-sided “chesed” and left-sided “din.” This explains very nicely the minhag (based on the words of the Raiya Mehemna, Pinchas, 228b) to make the right strap longer than the left strap to enhance the power of “chesed” over that of “din.”

This also explains very nicely why the tefillin “shel rosh” must have four separate compartments whereas the tefillin “shel yad” only have one. For, we know that there are four types of Torah exegesis, whose mnemonic is פּרד"ס, which is an acronym for פ'שט ר'מוז ד'רש ס'וד. Accordingly, let us suggest the following: The tefillin “shel yad” allude to the self-sacrifice exhibited by Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu during the ordeal of the Akeidah. Self-sacrifice is only one way of serving Hashem and is contingent on the capability and devotion of each individual Jew. In contrast, the tefillin “shel rosh” allude to Yaakov Avinu, the pillar of Torah. Therefore, it contains four separate compartments corresponding to the four aspects of Torah-study--פּרד"ס.

## The Name Hashem of the Tefillin “Shel Rosh” Originated with Yaakov

Applying what we have learned, it gives me great pleasure to interpret the passuk in parshas Ki Savo (Devarim 28, 10): **“ויראו: כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך—then all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of Hashem is proclaimed upon you, and they will fear you.** In the Gemara (ibid. 35b), Rabbi Eliezer the Great expounded: **“אלו תפילין שבראש”—these are the tefillin worn on the head.** The commentaries find this perplexing: Where do we find on the tefillin “shel rosh” that the name **Havaya** is proclaimed on us? Furthermore, why are the nations of the world afraid specifically of the tefillin “shel rosh” and not the tefillin “shel yad”?

It appears that we can provide an explanation based on that which is written about Yaakov Avinu (Bereishis 28, 12): **“ויחלום: והנה סולם מוצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה, והנה מלאכי אלקים עולים ויורדים. And he dreamt and behold! A ladder was set earthward, and its top reached heavenward; and behold—G-d’s malachim ascending and descending on it.** They expounded in the Gemara (Chullin 91b) that when the malachim ascended, they saw the image of man etched on the Kisei HaKavod—the Throne of Glory. Then, when they descended back down to earth, they realized that the image on the Kisei HaKavod was that of Yaakov Avinu. They were so envious that they wanted to kill him. Therefore: **“והנה ה' נצב עליו—and behold! Hashem was standing over him—**it was necessary for Hashem to protect him from the malachim.

This is extremely surprising and hard to believe. It seems inconceivable that G-d’s malachim would wish to harm Yaakov Avinu to the point that it was necessary for HKB”H to protect him. We can make sense of this, however, by referring to the Midrash (S.R. 32, 7). There, it explains that these were not holy malachim. On the contrary, they were the ministering angels of the seventy nations of the world. So, when the Torah says: **“Behold! Hashem was standing over him”—**it is telling us that Hashem was protecting Yaakov Avinu from the seventy guardian angels who sought to harm him.

Now, seeing as the tefillin “shel rosh” represent Yaakov Avinu, we can explain the elucidation in the Gemara very nicely. The passuk says: **“Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of Hashem is proclaimed upon you, and they**

**will fear you.”** They expound: **“These are the tefillin worn on the head.”** For, in the merit of donning the tefillin “shel rosh,” we elicit the kedushah of Yaakov Avinu, whom Hashem protected from the seventy, heavenly, ministering angels, as it states: **“And behold! Hashem was standing over him.”** This then is the message of the passuk: **“Then all the peoples of the earth will see”—**in other words, the seventy nations of the world, who are controlled by the seventy ministering angels, will see: **“that the name of Hashem is proclaimed upon you.”** They will recognize the presence of the name **Havaya** that stood over Yaakov to protect him; **“and they will fear you”—**just like the guardian angels were afraid to cause any harm to Yaakov.

### “This is the Torah of a man who dies in a tent”

Following this line of reasoning, we will proceed to interpret the passuk from this week’s parsha with which we opened this essay: **“And it will be for you a sign on your hand and for a remembrance between your eyes, so that Hashem’s Torah may be in your mouth.”** We will explain the practical significance of the command to don the “shel yad” prior to the “shel rosh.” To begin with, we will introduce a teaching from the Mishnah (Avos 1, 2): **“על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל: The world stands on three things (it is supported by three pillars)—on the Torah, on religious service and on the performance of acts of kindness.** The Zohar hakadosh (Vayeitzei 146b) explains that the three Avos are these three pillars: **The (pillar of) Torah is Yaakov;** (the pillar of) **religious service is Yitzchak;** (the pillar of) **acts of kindness is Avraham.** Avraham Avinu was preoccupied with the mitzvah of “hachnasas orchim”; hence, he represents the pillar of “gemilus chasadim”—performing acts of kindness. Yitzchak Avinu, who was placed as a korban atop the mizbeiach represents the pillar of “avodah”—religious service. While Yaakov Avinu dedicated himself to Torah-study, as it is written (ibid. 25, 27): **“ויעקב איש תם יושב אהלים”—Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents.** Rashi explains that this refers to the tents of Shem and Eiver.

Now, we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 63b): **“מנין שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, שנאמר זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל.” From where do we learn that words of Torah are not retained except by one who sacrifices himself**

**for the sake of the Torah? For it is stated** (Bamidbar 19, 14): **“This is the Torah of a man who dies in a tent.”** We can suggest that this is the reason that HKB”H arranged for Akeidas Yitzchak to occur prior to the birth of Yaakov. First, it was necessary for Avraham and Yitzchak to demonstrate the service characterized by self-sacrifice. Thus, when Yaakov was born, the pillar of Torah, he could learn from their example and study Torah with self-sacrifice; this would ensure that he would retain his Torah. It is precisely for this reason that we don the tefillin “shel yad” prior to the tefillin “shel rosh.” First, we don the tefillin that allude to self-sacrifice; afterwards, we don the tefillin that allude to the Torah, which will not endure without self-sacrifice.

In light of what we have learned, we can appreciate why HKB”H commanded us to don tefillin daily. We are all familiar with words of the Midrash (Tanna D’Vei Eliyahu Rabbah, Chapter 25): **“שכל אחד ואחד מישראל חייב לומר, מתי יגיעו מעשי למעשה: Every single Jew must ask himself, “When will my actions equal the actions of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov?”** Let us propose that we accomplish this daily by donning the tefillin “shel yad” and “shel rosh.” For, as explained the two tefillin represent the three holy Avos. So, by wearing tefillin, we are able to connect with their kedushah.

We can now comprehend the message of the passuk: **“And it will be for you a sign on your hand”**—refers to the tefillin “shel yad” that represent Avraham on the right, who bound Yitzchak on the left; **“and for a remembrance between your eyes”**—refers to the tefillin “shel rosh” that represents Yaakov, the pillar of Torah. Then, the text goes on to explain the purpose and benefit of donning tefillin—to learn from the three holy Avos the importance of combining Torah-study with self-sacrifice; **“so that Hashem’s Torah may be in your mouth”**—because it will only endure in our mouths, if we are willing to sacrifice ourselves on its behalf.

### **The Tefillin “Shel Rosh” Represent Yaakov Avinu in Whose Merit the Third Beis HaMikdash Will Be Built**

Continuing onward on this majestic path, we will proceed to explain the esoteric comment of the divine Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the Zohar hakadosh that the secret of the tefillin can be found in the passuk: **“They will make Me a**

**Mikdash, so that I may dwell among them.”** We will refer to an elucidation in the Gemara (Pesachim 88a):

**“מאי דכתיב והלכו עמים רבים ואמרו, לכו ונעלה אל הר ה' אל בית אלקי יעקב וגו', אלקי יעקב ולא אלקי אברהם ויצחק? אלא לא כאברהם שכתוב בו הר, שנאמר אשר יאמר היום בהר ה' יראה, ולא כיצחק שכתוב בו שדה, שנאמר ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה, אלא כיעקב שקראו בית, שנאמר ויקרא את שם המקום ההוא בית אל”.**

**What is the meaning of the passuk** (Yeshayah 2, 3): **“Many nations will go and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the Mountain of Hashem, to the House (“בית”) of the G-d of Yaakov, etc.”? Why specifically the G-d of Yaakov and not the G-d of Avraham and Yitzchak? Because it is not like Avraham, who called it a “mountain”** (Bereishis 22, 14) . . . **And not like Yitzchak, who called it a “field”** (ibid. 24, 63) . . . **Rather, it is like Yaakov, who called it** (ibid. 28, 19) **a “house” (“בית”).** In his commentary on Maseches Avos, Derech Chaim (5, 4), the Maharal explains that this teaches us that the three Batei HaMikdash are in the merit of the three holy Avos.

The Alshich (Vayikra 26, 13) explains that the first Beis HaMikdash stood in the merit of Avraham Avinu; it was destroyed by our enemies because of Yishmael who was fathered by Avraham. The second Beis HaMikdash stood in the merit of Yitzchak Avinu; it was destroyed by our enemies, because of Eisav who was fathered by Yitzchak. The third Beis HaMikdash, however, will stand in the merit of Yaakov Avinu whose bed was flawless—meaning that all of his children were tzaddikim. Hence, it will stand forevermore.

We now have cause to rejoice; for, we can shed some light on and begin to comprehend Rashbi’s statement. The tefillin “shel yad” resemble the Akeidah, as explained above. They correspond to the first Beis HaMikdash and the second Beis HaMikdash, which stood in the merits of Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu respectively. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the site of the Akeidah was Har HaMoriah, the site where the first two Batei Mikdash were destined to be built. Tefillin “shel rosh,” on the other hand, represent Yaakov Avinu; they represent the third Beis HaMikdash that will built in the merit of Yaakov Avinu. Then, at the time of the future geulah, HKB”H’s promise will come to complete fruition: **“Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of**

**Hashem is proclaimed upon you, and they will fear you”— these are the tefillin worn on the head.**

This explains magnificently the passuk describing Yaakov’s actions at the site of the Mikdash (ibid. 28, 11): **”וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבְנֵי הַמִּקְדָּשׁ: וַיִּשֶׂם מֵרֵאשִׁיתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמִּקְדָּשׁ הַהוּא”**—**he took from the stones of the place, and he placed them around his head, and lay down in that place.** Rashi comments: **He arranged them like a gutter-pipe around his head, because he feared the presence of wild animals.** It seems strange that he only saw fit to protect his head. However, this concurs very nicely with our current discussion. Since Yaakov Avinu is associated with the tefillin “shel rosh”—the head-tefillin—which correspond

to the third Beis HaMikdash, he took care to specifically create a gutter-pipe to protect his head.

In this manner, everything ties together wonderfully. The tefillin “shel yad”—resembling Akeidas Yitzchak—correspond to the first and second Batei HaMikdash—which were built in the merits of Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu. The tefillin “shel rosh” correspond to the third Beis HaMikdash that will be built in the merit of Yaakov Avinu. By performing the mitzvah of donning the tefillin “shel yad” and “shel rosh” every day, we connect with the kedushah of the three holy Avos, preparing for the third Beis HaMikdash that will be built swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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