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Left Arm for Tefillin

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: *Your arm* refers to one’s left arm. [*The arm tefillin should be worn on one’s left arm.*] One might think it applies to his right arm. This is why the verse states: *Also My arm founded the earth, and My right (arm) measured out the heavens. (This indicates that “arm” (without specifying the “right” one) refers to one’s left arm.)* The verse also states: *She stretched her arm to the peg, and her right (arm) to the workers’ hammer.* The verse also states: *Why should You return Your arm, even Your right (arm)? Remove it from Your bosom to destroy (the enemies).*

Rabbi Yosi HaChoreim said: We find that the right arm is also referred to as “arm,” as it is written: *And Yosef saw that his father was placing his right arm (on the head of Efraim).*

The *Gemora* notes that the *Tanna Kamma* (the initial opinion) responds that the Torah writes “his right arm” (and only then is it referring to the “right”) but an unspecified “arm” (written in the Torah) refers to the “left” one.

Rabbi Nassan says: The previous verse is unnecessary (to prove that tefillin should be worn on the left arm), for since it is written: *And you shall bind them ... and and you shall write them (upon your doorposts).* Just as writing (the *mezuzah*) is with the right hand, so too the binding shall

be done with the right hand, and if the binding is done with the right hand, then obviously the *tefillin* must be worn on the left hand.

The *Gemora* notes that Rabbi Yosi HaChoreim (who disagreed with the first exposition) derives it from that same passage from which Rabbi Nassan derives it.

Rav Ashi said: He derives it from the word *yadchah* -- your hand; which, being written with the letter “hei” (at the end of the word), indicates that the *tefillin* shall be placed on the weaker arm (the left one).

Rabbi Abba asked Rav Ashi: Perhaps it means “the arm which has strength” (referring to the right arm)?

He replied, Is it written with the letter “ches” (indicating strength; the word “ko’ach” means strength)?

The *Gemora* notes that this is actually a matter of a *Tannaic* dispute, for it was taught in a *braisa*: *Yadchah* -- your hand; which, being written with the letter “hei” (at the end of the word), indicates that the *tefillin* shall be placed on the left arm (the weaker one). Others say: The word teaches us that an amputee is obligated in *tefillin* as well.

The *Gemora* cites a different *braisa*: If one has no (left) arm, he is exempt from the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*. [*He, nevertheless, dons the head tefillin, for we will learn below*



that the two mitzvos are independent of each other.] Others say: The word *yadchah* -- your hand teaches us that an amputee is obligated in *tefillin* as well.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: One who is left-handed wears *tefillin* on his right arm, which is regarded as "his left arm" (for the *mitzvah*).

The *Gemora* asks from a *braisa* which rules that he wears *tefillin* on his left hand, which is the left arm of all other people!?

Abaye answers: That *braisa* is referring to a person who uses both hands equally (*he is ambidextrous; a left-handed person, however, dons tefillin on his right arm*). (36b – 37a)

Head Tefillin

A *braisa* was taught in Menashe's Academy: *On your arm* refers to the biceps muscle (*this is where the arm tefillin shall be placed*). *Between your eyes* refers to the *kadkod* (*this is where the head tefillin shall be placed*). In Rabbi Yannai's Academy, they explained this to mean the place where the skull of an infant is soft (*the fontanel*).

Plimo inquired of Rebbe: If a man has two heads, on which one must he put the *tefillin*?

Rebbe replied: You must either leave into exile, or accept yourself under an excommunication (*for you are mocking me*).

In the meantime, there came a certain man to Rebbe saying, "A firstborn child with two heads was born to me; how much money must I give the *Kohen* (as redemption)?" An elderly man came forward and ruled that he must give ten *selaim* (*five for each head*).

The *Gemora* asks: But this is not so! For Rami bar Chamah taught the following: It is written: *You shall surely redeem*. One might think that this would apply even when the firstborn was killed within thirty days of his birth; the Torah inserted the term "but" to exclude it.

The *Gemora* answers: There it is different, for the *mitzvah* of redemption is dependent on the head count. (37a – 37b)

Scriptural Sources

The master had stated: *On your arm* refers to the biceps muscle (*this is where the arm tefillin shall be placed*).

The *Gemora* asks: From where is this derived?

The *Gemora* answers by citing the following *braisa*: *On your arm* that is, the upper part of the arm. You say it is the upper part of the arm, but perhaps it means actually upon the hand? Since the Torah tells us that one must put *tefillin* upon the arm and also upon the head; just as by the head, it is to be placed upon the high part of the head, so too regarding the arm, it is to be placed upon the high part of the arm.

Rabbi Eliezer said: This is unnecessary, for the verse says: *And it shall be for you a sign*, implying that the sign shall be for you but not for others. [*If the tefillin would be placed on one's hand, it would be visible to all; evidently, it is placed on the height of the arm, a place which is generally covered by one's garment.*]

Rabbi Yitzchak said: This too is unnecessary, for it is written: *And you shall place these words of Mine upon your heart . . . and you shall bind them*, implying that it must be placed opposite the heart.

Rabbi Chiya and Rav Acha the son of Rav Avya used to place it exactly opposite the heart (*by positioning the tefillin inwards – towards the heart*).

Rav Ashi was once sitting before Ameimar, and Ameimar had a tear on the sleeve of his arm and his *tefillin* were exposed. Rav Ashi said to him: Does the master not hold that the sign shall be for you but not for others?

He replied: That was stated only to indicate the place of the *tefillin*.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa* which teaches us the correct place on the head for the head *tefillin*: *Between your eyes* refers to the high part of the head. You say it is the high part of the head, but perhaps it means actually between the eyes? It is written here: *between your eyes*, and it is written there (*regarding a mourner*): *You shall not make any baldness between your eyes for the dead*. We expound a *gezeirah shavah* (*one of the thirteen principles of Biblical hermeneutics; it links two similar words from dissimilar verses in the Torah*) as follows: Just as there it means the high part of the head, a place where a bald spot can be made, so too here it means the high part of the head, a place where a bald spot can be made.

Rabbi Yehudah says: This is unnecessary, for since the Torah tells us that one must put *tefillin* upon the arm and also upon the head: Just as by the arm, it is to be placed upon a part of the arm which can become *tamei* with only one type of a *tzaraas* affliction, so too regarding the head; it is to be placed upon the part of the head which can become *tamei* with only one type of a *tzaraas* affliction. This excludes the place between the eyes where flesh and hair are to be found, and so can become *tamei* (*in two ways*) either by the appearance of white hair or yellow hair. [*It must be that the place of the tefillin is high on the*

head, a place which can only become tamei with skin tzaraas.] (37b)

Four Fringes

The *Mishna* had stated: The four *tzitziyos* (*fringes placed on a four-cornered garment*) are essential to one another, since the four of them constitute one *mitzvah*. [*Rabbi Yishmael said: The four of them constitute four mitzvos.*]

Rav Yosef notes a practical difference between them: They differ in respect of a linen sheet with wool *tzitzis*. [*In ordinary cases, such a garment may not be worn, due to shatnez (wool and linen mixed together), except where the mitzvah of tzitzis is concerned. Where, however, one fringe (from the four) was missing, the entire mitzvah, according to the Tanna Kamma has gone, and the garment is therefore forbidden to be worn; but according to Rabbi Yishmael it is permitted, since each fringe is an independent mitzvah.*]

Rava bar Ahina said: They differ with respect of a five-cornered garment. [*According to the Tanna Kamma, one must put on tzitzis to only four of the corners, but according to Rabbi Yishmael, five would be necessary.*]

Ravina said: They differ regarding Rav Huna's *halachah*, for Rav Huna said: If a man went out in the street on *Shabbos* wearing a garment which did not have the proper amount of fringes attached to it, he is liable to a *chatas*. [*They argue if this halachah would apply in a case where he merely attached three fringes to the four corners.*]

Rav Shisha the son of Rav Idi said: If a man cut off one corner of his four-cornered garment, he has accomplished nothing, for he has simply made it into a five-cornered garment (*which is also liable in tzitzis*).



Rav Mesharsheya said: If a man folded up and knotted his garment (*attempting to exempt it by rendering it into a "rounded garment"*), he has accomplished nothing, for it is regarded as if it is already untied.

Rav Dimi of Nehardea said: If a man folded up and sewed his garment (*attempting to exempt it by rendering it into a "rounded garment"*), he has accomplished nothing, for if he really has no use for the corners, he should cut them off and discard them.

The *Mishna* had stated: Rabbi Yishmael said: The four of them constitute four *mitzvos*.

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel that the *halachah* follows Rabbi Yishmael.

The *Gemora* rules: The *halachah*, however, is not in accordance with him.

Ravina was once walking behind Mar the son of Rav Ashi on the *Shabbos* of the Festival discourse, when suddenly a corner of Mar's garment with its fringes had torn away, but Ravina told him nothing about it. When he came home and Ravina told him that it had torn away at a certain place on the way, Mar said: Had you told me of it then, I would then and there throw the garment off.

The *Gemora* asks: But has not a master said that the human dignity of a man is so great that it overrides a negative precept of the Torah?

Rav bar Shaba explained this before Rav Kahana: This only applies to the prohibition of "*You shall not deviate*" (*which is the prohibition against deviating from that which the Rabbis decreed; such a prohibition is overridden by human dignity, but not a Biblical prohibition*).

Others reported it that Ravina told him of it there in the street. Mar asked him: Do you think that I should throw it off here? But has not a master said that the human dignity of a man is so great that it overrides a negative precept of the Torah?

The *Gemora* asks: But Rav bar Shaba explained this before Rav Kahana that this only applies to the prohibition of "*You shall not deviate*"!?

The *Gemora* answers: Here too it was only a *karmelis* (*an area which is neither a public nor a private domain, in which, however, it is forbidden to carry anything on Shabbos by a Rabbinic decree*), so that the prohibition is only Rabbinic. (37b – 38a)

WE SHALL RETURN TO YOU, HAKOMEITZ

DAILY MASHAL

He Meant Rabbeinu Tam

Tosfos on our *sugya* mention the disagreement between Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam concerning the order of the *parshiyos* in the head *tefillin*. Many Chassidim and Sephardim put on both. It is told that people came to the Chazon Ish zt"l and angrily told him that a certain great chassidic *Rebbe* said that someone who doesn't put on Rabbeinu Tam's *tefillin* is as though he never put on *tefillin*. The Chazon Ish heard them and calmed them: "Nu, this is no innovation. One of our very greatest already said so."

"And who was he?" they wondered.

"Rabbeinu Tam..."