

Ideas in Chukim

Although popularly misconceived, "Chukim" - statutes - such as Tefilin and Mikva, also contain great wisdom. All of G-d's commands benefit man - as an intelligent being.

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Lech Licha

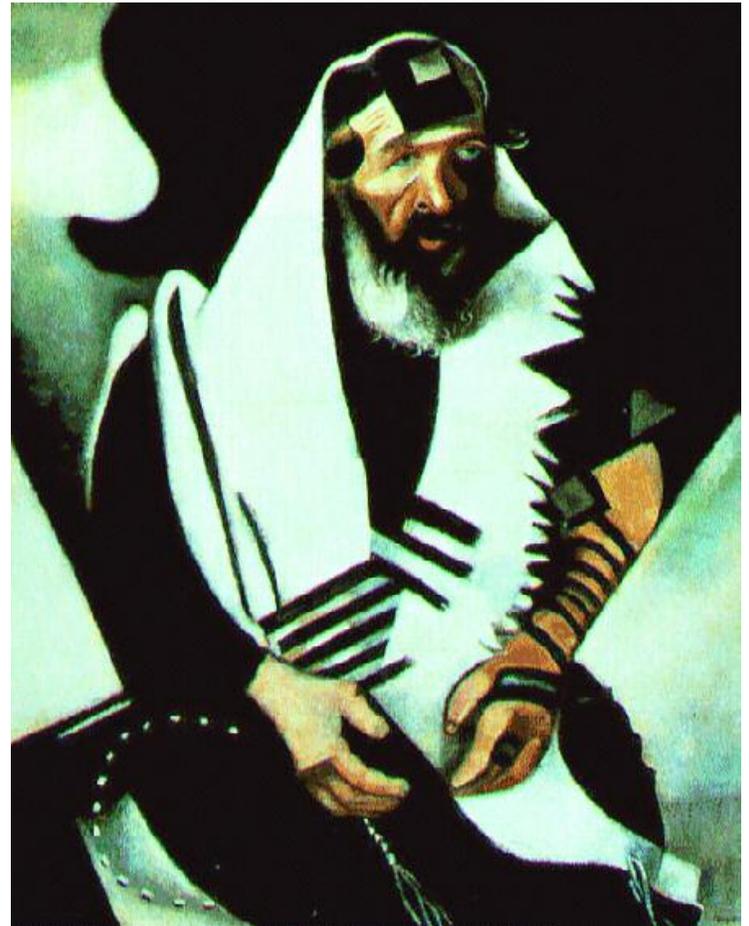
RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students



In Genesis Chapter 11 verses 31 and 32 the Torah recites that Terach took Abraham, Lot and Sarah and moved from Ur Casdim towards the land of Canaan. They ultimately settled in Charan where Terach lived until 205 years old. He thereafter died in Charan. Rashi tells us that Abraham actually was commanded by G-d to leave 60 years prior to Terach's death. However, the Torah does not want to publicize the fact that Abraham left his father when he was an old man, lest he be suspected of disregarding the commandment of honoring his father. This concern is evident because the Torah never portrayed Terach's real identity as an idol worshiper. However, this contributed to the fact that G-d commanded Abraham while his father was still alive, to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house and go to the land that I (G-d) will show you.

Rashi on verse 1 of Chapter 12 asks a very simplistic but insightful question. G-d is telling Abraham to leave his birthplace. This is puzzling because his birthplace was Ur



Tefilin

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Tefilin are a positive, Torah command. According to its original law, they are to be worn all day. But man presently is not on the level to keep his mind on Tefilin, so we limit our wearing of them to the duration of the morning prayers.

The Tefilin contain four portions of the Torah, commencing with these

LECH LECHA

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Haran died in the presence of his father Terach in the land of his birth, Ur Kasdim." (Bereshit 11:28)

The above passage is found at the end of Parshat Noach. Rashi, in his comments on this pasuk, provides an important biographical note on Avraham – the main character of

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Lech Licha

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students

Casdim which Abraham already left. He had previously departed to Canaan with his father and settled in Charan. Rashi answers that G-d informed Abraham that he should depart further from Charan and leave his fathers home. Furthermore, G-d tells Abraham to move to a land that I will show you. Rashi comments that G-d did not show him the land immediately in order to make the land more beloved in his eyes. Additionally, G-d's command to leave is verbose and seems redundant. Leave your land, birthplace and your fathers house, are all these terms necessary to describe the same place? Rashi explains that G-d wanted to reward him for each and every word that G-d uttered with respect to his departure from Charan.

Upon closer scrutinization, Rashi's explanations raise several questions. Why didn't G-d simply state leave Charan and not as Rashi equates it, as a further departure from Ur Casdim. We must also attempt to understand in what manner does God's concealing the identity of the land make it more appealing. Additionally what is Rashi's intent in stating that G-d wanted Abraham to be rewarded for each word uttered. What is the correlation between the length of the utterance to the reward and the ethical perfection of Abraham.

Abraham was raised in Terach's home which was a household which worshiped idols. Despite these influences Abraham recognized G-d as the source of reality. This attests the strength of Abraham's intellectual conviction. He elevated himself to a higher level of perfection. However, even Abraham was subject to the influences of his father's home. A human being has a certain underlying base which throughout his life gives him a strong sense of security. This base usually stems from ones childhood. Throughout one's life it provides a sense of comfort and well being which allows the individual to become a functioning member of society.

If one were to analyze man's need for this sense of security it originates from the same emotion responsible for mans desire for idolatry. Human

nature demands certain assurances in order to protect and shield man from his insecurities. The Pagans sought the protection of all different G-ds, to shield them from all impending disasters of the outside world, real or imagined.

G-d by instructing Abraham to leave Ur Casdim was teaching Abraham an important concept which was essential for Abraham's quest for moral perfection. Ur Casdim represented to Abraham his base of security. He originally departed Ur Casdim to go to Canaan, but he stayed in Charan. Charan was not their ultimate destination. Politically he had to depart from Ur Casdim, but Charan was close enough in proximity to offer the security of Ur Casdim., to which Abraham had a strong emotional attachment to. It was his home base and gave him psychological security. Abraham had difficulty in abandoning the security of Ur Casdim. Rashi therefore explains, G-d commanded him to leave his birthplace, although he was already in Charan. Charan represented an extension of Ur Casdim. Charan afforded him the same security as Ur Casdim. Therefore Rashi explains that he should depart further from Ur Casdim. A person's home affords a person a strong sense of psychological security. A home is not just a physical phenomenon but a psychological phenomenon. The All Mighty was telling Abraham to leave behind this security.

Rashi explains that G-d told Abraham to leave his "Artzicha", hometown, "Moladit'cha", his birthplace and "Bais Avicha", his father's home in order to give him reward on each aspect of his removal. Each one of these ideas gives a person unique psychological comfort, which the perfected individual must abandon.

"Artzicha", his land represents a certain familiarity with a place which affords one the security an alien land can not afford.

"Moladit'cha", his birthplace, one's childhood hometown nourishes a certain special nostalgic feeling in a person which comforts him throughout his life.

"Bais Avicha", his fathers household. An individuals parents provide him with a strong sense of security. This security emanates from childhood, whereby the parent provided for and took care of all the child's needs.

G-d was telling Abraham to abandon all the psychological and emotional security that he had from these phenomena. A wise man abandons all his psychological insecurities and takes comfort only in reality. The Creator of the world, G-d is his security. Therefore Rashi is teaching us that G-d told Abraham, leave behind the emotional security of your childhood, your land, your birthplace and your father's home.

"Throw your bundles to G-d and his will be your portion". A chacham, (wise person) only seeks security in a system of ideas and concepts, with Hashem, G-d, at the source of this system. His security is the halachic system which gives him comfort and guides him though life. His security is solely placed in the fact that he is living a life that is in line with the ultimate reality. Attaining this sense of security demands an abandonment of the psychological and emotional securities that most individuals require. It is an extremely painful and difficult task but it is essential for a chacham in order to reach true perfection. This perfection demands that Hashem is his sole source of security.

These insights can also explain why G-d did not choose to show Abraham the land immediately. If G-d were to have shown Abraham the land at the time of his departure from Charan, he would merely have attached his need for security, to the new land. He would substitute the security furnished by his hometown with the security of his newly promised land. Thus G-d did not show him the land yet, as Rashi explains, in order that it should be cherished in his eyes. The love Abraham was ultimately going to have for the land would be based upon the halachic system and his relationship with Hashem as the source of that system. The love was not the love which an ordinary man displays for his homeland, which usually just represents his security. It was a qualitatively different type of love whereby Abraham would find his need for security fulfilled in his relationship with G-d. Therefore, G-d did not tell Abraham where he was going because the mind would naturally look for a substitute source of security. Only by Abraham's aspiring to this higher level of perfection, would he find G-d as his source of security. His ultimate love for the land would thus be based upon its special role in the halachic system. It could not be based on an emotional sense of chauvinism. Only after reaching this level of perfection could G-d bless Abraham and make him into a great nation "goy gadol." This blessing would therefore not be perceived by Abraham as a means to find security in his posterity, but rather as the ideal for establishing Am Yisroel, the Jewish people. ■

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Tefilin

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

verses: Exodus 13:1, Exodus 13:12, Deuteronomy 6:4, and Deuteronomy 11:13. One Tefilin is 'placed' on the head, and the other, 'tied' on the arm. The Tefilin of the head contain these four portions written on four separate skins - placed in four separate housings, while the Tefilin of the arm contain these same four portions, are written on one skin - place in one housing.

In each of these four Torah portions, we read of the command to wear Tefilin, with insight into their purpose. I will record the single verse of each of the four portions which contains the command, paraphrasing the context of each, and suggesting the distinction of these portions:

Portion 1 (Exod. 13:9): "And it will be to you a sign upon your hand, and a remembrance between your eyes, so that G-d's Torah will be in your mouth, for with a mighty hand did G-d take you out of Egypt." This portion addresses the command to designate to G-d, all firstborn males and animals. As G-d killed all first born males and animals in the final Plague, our dedication of these individuals is a command, for our recognition of G-d's kindness, in that He spared the firstborns of the Jews. This portion also includes the command to observe the Passover, eating Matza and no leaven. The Exodus is thereby recalled, and our appreciation of G-d's redemption is never forgotten.

Portion 2 (Exod. 13:16): "And it will be a sign upon your hand, and as Tefilin between your eyes for with a mighty hand did G-d take you out of Egypt." This portion includes the command to redeem all firstborn males, while also dedicating all firstborn male animals. We are commanded to

respond to our sons' questioning of this redemptive practice, by explaining the designation assigned to the Israelite firstborns. The Israelite firstborns too were to be slain by G-d's plague, but due to the commands we obeyed in Egypt, they were spared for a future designation of sole dedication to G-d's service. However, this law of redeeming the firstborns allows them to engage in mundane activity, like the rest of their fellow Jews, who work for their livings.

Portion 3 (Deut. 6:8): "And you shall tie them as a sign upon your arm, and they will be Tefilin between your eyes." This portion we are all familiar with, it is the first paragraph of the Shema Yisrael prayer. We enunciate our conviction in the absolute oneness of the Creator, and our complete direction of our actions to His service, (ibid 4:5) "And you shall love your G-d with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."

Portion 4 (Deut. 11:18): "And you shall place these words on your heart and on your soul, and you shall tie them as a sign upon your arms, and they shall be Tefilin between your eyes." This portion addresses the concept of reward and punishment, as rain is promised or withheld, depending on our fulfillment or abandonment of His commands. We are also warned against idolatry, and promised to be driven from Israel as a punishment. This is the second paragraph of the Shema Yisrael.

We can abbreviate these four portions. Besides commanding us in Tefilin, they cover the following ideas:

The Portion's Theme	Related Concepts	Recurring Theme
1) Sanctifying Firstborns	10th Plague (Firstborns); the Exodus	Transmission to Sons (Exod. 13:8)
2) Redeeming Firstborns	Recalling Exodus via Animal Dedication & Human Redemption	Transmission to Sons (Exod. 13:14)
3) Unity and Love of God	Complete Devotion to G-d; Preoccupation with Torah	Transmission to Sons (Deut. 6:7)
4) Reward and Punishment	Warning Against Idolatry; Our Sustenance Depends on G-d; Exile	Transmission to Sons (Deut. 11:19)

(By the inclusion of the command to "transmit to sons" contained in all four portions, we learn of G-d's concern that future generations are raised with these concepts.)

We must ask a few questions to understand this command:

1) What is the concept of placing Torah portions on our bodies? 2) Why in these two specific locations? 3) Why is the Tefilin of the head contain these four portions in individual compartments, on individual skins, but the arm has all four in one compartment, and written on one skin? 4) The order of the head's portions is the reverse of what we would think. Although the portions are in the order of the Torah, commencing with Exodus 13:1 and ending with Deut. 11:13, this order is arranged so if another person would view our own Tefilin, it would be in the correct order of HIS reading. Why must the head's portions be in order for a viewer, and not for us? 5) Regarding the arm's Tefilin, we read above that it is always referred to as a "sign". What does this mean? 6) The head's Tefilin is referred to as Totafos ("Tefilin" according to Unkelos) in all cases, except in the first portion,

where it is referred to as a "remembrance". Why this deviation in this one case? 7) Only regarding the arm's Tefilin, do we read that it must be "tied". In all cases, the head's Tefilin is "to be", just "to be" - no command exists to "tie" it on our heads. Maimonides supports this distinction in his Yad HaChazakah, Laws of Tefilin, Chapter 1:1 in his Kesser, ("Crown") which is the opening, succinct classification of all commands in that portion. He writes, "A. There should be Tefilin on the head, B. To tie them on the arm." No law exists to tie the Tefilin of the head. How do we understand this command that this one Tefilin should just "be" on the head? What is the fulfillment of this command? 8) Maimonides records many similarities in the laws governing the procedures and substances for creating a Torah, Mezuzah and Tefilin. What is the similarity of all three, taught through these laws?

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Tefilin

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

9) Maimonides states (ibid, 3:17) that one is not allowed to convert the Tefilin of the head into the Tefilin of the arm, but vice versa is permitted. The reasoning is the Torah principle, "One may ascend in sanctity, but not descend." What "higher" sanctity exists in the Tefilin of the head? 10) Mezuzah and Tefilin contain Torah portions. Why must we not only learn Torah, but also have these additional laws of placing Torah portions on our homes and our bodies? What is the difference between Tefilin and Mezuzah, that the Mezuzah contains only two of these four portions, the two paragraphs of the Shema?

As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains, the term "Tefilin" is a derivative of the word "pilale", as in "Tefila", to "judge". We are to judge our actions when we pray to G-d, analyzing ourselves, and presenting to G-d our requests that will assist in our intelligent, life-plan. Tefilin too are meant to assist us in judging correct ideas, for our actions to follow. The four portions are separated on our heads, as we must review each concept individually, if we are to apprehend each portion's significance. We must then follow through in unified activity, as demonstrated by all four portions, united on one parchment, in the arm's Tefilin. Thoughts without action display a disjointed being. We are deviant, if we study, but lack the self application of these ideas. Action, is the true barometer of a person who is convinced of what he learned. If one fails to act on his studies, he displays a lack of conviction. Tefilin straddle both; man's thoughts, and his actions. There cannot be any separation. The whole being comes under the service of G-d, as displayed by the law to have the name of G-d displayed in the knots and boxes of the Tefilin. But in addition to action, the Tefilin of the arm are to be set facing the heart. This demonstrates that just as one's thoughts (Tefilin of the head) are devoted to G-d, so too are one's emotions. The High Priest wears a gold, forehead plate (Tzitz) with "Holy to G-d" written upon it, and a breastplate with the twelve tribes' names engraved therein. These two objects also teach these concepts; the most perfected of the Jewish nation, the High Priest, displays what the most perfect attitude must be: One's mind must be devoted to G-d's law, while one's heart goes out to his brothers and sisters. This is true perfection. The Ten Commandments too, are divided into these two categories: laws between man and G-d, and laws between man and his fellow.

Why Place Tefilin on Our Bodies?

Perhaps one must realize that the human being, as a physical entity alone, is gravely incomplete. The Talmud teaches a parable; (paraphrased) "one is likened to a sickly being, and there is a bandage. If he keeps the bandage on, he survives, if he removes it, he dies. This bandage is Torah." Wearing the Tefilin, a person demonstrates that Torah is essential to his very being. He is not complete without the Tefilin. The Torah is, as any vital organ. This would support the law of wearing Tefilin the entire day; there is no part in the day, in our lives, where man can exist as intended, without adhering to the Torah laws, vital to our existence as "man", a G-d fearing being.

Torah is insufficient for man's perfection, while remaining in the scroll.

Portions must be "worn" as Tefilin, and also "posted", as a Mezuzah. Both, man's body and his home, must have concrete displays of Torah portions. But why are they not the same portions? The Mezuzah omits the first two portions included in the Tefilin. Why? The Tefilin's first two portions bear one common theme: man's existence. They refer to our freedom from Egypt, and the redemption of the firstborns. I believe this is indicative of two roles in man's existence. Freedom from Egypt addresses man's "actions", i.e. he is now free to "do" what he wills, and that must be the adherence to Torah. However, redemption of firstborns does not address actions, but man's physical "self". Our very lives were spared by G-d's mercy. The Jews were also to be killed, had it not been for G-d's commands which earned back our lives. Since these two first portions in the Tefilin address man as a being - his actions and his very life - they are limited to Tefilin, and not included in Mezuzah. Tefilin are commands on one's body. Mezuzah, on the other hand, is posted on the doorposts of our homes. What is a home? It represents man's life on Earth - his abode, where he eats, sleeps, and raises his family. Man must acknowledge that his stay here on Earth has a purpose, found in his realization of the Creator, and that he must devote himself to Him. Man is also accountable for his actions. The two portions of the Shema, posted on our homes contain these two principles.

Man requires physical reminders of basic truths. He must view his very self as incomplete without Torah (Tefilin), and his home, as targeting G-d's goals, not his own securities (Mezuzah). These concepts must reflect the entire Torah. Therefore, when creating Tefilin and Mezuzah, many of the same laws of a Torah scroll apply.

There is an additional benefit to placing Tefilin on our bodies. By nature, man identifies his self with his appearance. We often refer to a loss of communication as "I haven't 'seen' you in so long", or "It's good to 'see' you." Clothing is so valued, and so diverse in style, as each person dresses with some fashion peculiar to how he identifies himself. Man's appearance plays a role in our own self image, and how we view others. By placing Tefilin on our bodies, we compromise our subjective identity of the self, conforming our identity to one synonymous with Torah - we are wearing portions of Torah.

Tefilin - An Item to be "Read"

The Talmud (Minachos, 35b) teaches according to Rabbi Eliezer the Great, that the following verse refers to the Tefilin of the head, (Deut. 28:10) "And all the nations of the Earth will see that G-d's name is called upon you, and they will fear you." We said earlier that the law is; the order of the Torah portions in the Tefilin of the head must be in the Torah's sequence - but from the vantage point of another person viewing you, not the one wearing it. (If the order is reversed, such Tefilin are unfit for use.) This is in line with our verse, that the Tefilin of the head are for the onlooker, be he Jew or Gentile. What do we learn from this verse, and our law?

It would appear that the Tefilin must possess the status of a "read" object. Although no one can see through the external, black leather casings, the

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Tefilin

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Tefilin serve a purpose of "study", or understanding. Tefilin are essentially "written" objects, just as is the Torah. Torah, Tefilin and Mezuzah share the common goal of "study". One must contemplate the portions contained in the Tefilin and Mezuzah, if he is to truly fulfill these commands. This is the purpose of a written object. To demonstrate this essential feature, the Tefilin must be arranged so that one who can see these four portions, (the "reader" facing one wearing Tefilin) 'reads' them in the order in which they appear in the Torah. This order of portions reflects the complete Torah. Tefilin thereby achieve their goal of reflecting the Torah scroll, both, through their legibility for the "reader", and through reflecting the Torah's order.

One who wears Tefilin is not doing so for the "reader", but as a fulfillment of his own command. Even if there was nobody present, one must wear Tefilin each day.

Tefilin - A "Sign"

In all four portions, we are told that Tefilin are a "sign". We also learn (Minachos, 36b) that Tefilin are not worn on the Sabbath and holidays, as these days are inherently a sign. What is this concept? A sign to what?

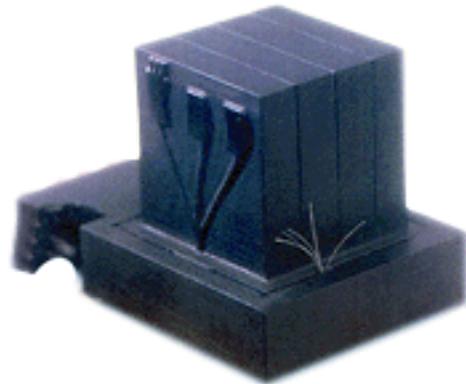
We have already defined Tefilin as portions of the Torah. The Torah is synonymous with G-d. The Sabbath recalls the Creation, but in specific, the day in which work is prohibited, and wisdom is pursued, unhindered by physical labor. The holidays recall G-d's miracles performed throughout history. All three, Tefilin, Sabbath, and holidays, are signs to G-d's involvement in man's existence. Sabbath defined the purpose of Creation, i.e., the pursuit of wisdom. Holidays recall G-d's unceasing relationship with the Jewish nation, and Tefilin are a sign of G-d's Torah, commanded to the Jews. Therefore, a "sign" is that which attests to G-d's involvement with man. G-d's "signs" underline these two basic principles; 1) the purpose of Creation is G-d's display of wisdom in the universe, 2) the purpose of man is to pursue G-d's wisdom through Torah.

Wearing Tefilin, we are set apart from other nations, as the people commanded in Torah, signified through Tefilin, a miniature Torah. Inactivity on the Sabbath and holidays is also a physical deviation from other nations. But here, we deviate in activity, not in our physical presence, as done through Tefilin.

We now learn something new; these signs are to set the Jew apart in a visible fashion. We are different both in physical appearance by wearing black boxes all day, and we are different by not working, as all other peoples do on specified days. We must now ask, "why must we deviate?"

It would appear that deviating in a visible fashion drives at the purpose of

displaying G-d's Torah to all nations. As we said, Rabbi Eliezer the Great taught, "And all the nations of the Earth will see that G-d's name is called upon you, and they will fear you" refers to the Tefilin of the head. This is our goal: we must make ourselves visually distinct, if we are to avail ourselves to others who are desirous of inquiring of G-d, and His laws. If other nations cannot detect the Jew, we cause them a great disservice by such concealment, whereby we sever their connection to the recipients and teachers of G-d's Torah.



Summary

Tefilin cause us to never forget the following:

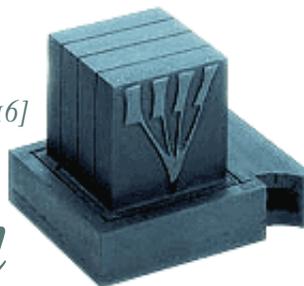
1) G-d's Exodus: we are continually thankful to Him for our freedom to follow Torah. 2) G-d's sole responsibility for our lives: redeeming our firstborn sons, and dedicating the firstborn animals to Temple service. 3) G-d is One: our goal in life is to approach G-d in all our actions, there is not other god. 4) G-d is the only Ruler: our actions - good or bad - meet with a response from G-d,...alone.

We may deduce that if Tefilin are to function as "daily reminders" of these concepts, that man's natural disposition - in some ways - is not in line with these themes, and therefore requires constant subordination. Man possesses many components in his being, such as pride, independence, the desire for unbridled activity, and psychological security. I suggest that Tefilin teach us the Torah's basic tenets, while simultaneously subordinating man's natural, emotional tendencies to intelligent truths. (Below) ■

The Portion's Theme	Component in Man being Addressed
1) Sanctifying Firstborns	"False Pride" is broken down via our thanks for G-d's freeing us from Egyptian Bondage.
2) Redeeming Firstborns	"Independence" is broken down via realization that our lives are in G-d's hands.
3) Unity and Love of God	"Unbridled Activity" is broken down via realization to approach G-d as our sole purpose.
4) Reward and Punishment	"False Security" is broken down, all comes from Him. Only G-d holds us accountable. G-d alone exists.

There is much more to be said, and we have not answered all our questions. Feel free to write in with your thoughts.

[Exodus 13:16]



Ramban on TEFILIN

“...Now the fundamental reason of this commandment is that we lay the script of the exodus from Egypt upon the hand and upon the head opposite the heart and the brain, which are the pivots of thought. Thus we are to inscribe [on parchment] the Scriptural sections of Kadesh (Sanctify unto Me) [Verses 1-10], and V'haya ki y'viacha (And it shall be when the Eternal shall bring thee) [Verses 11-16], and enclose them in the phylacteries because of this commandment wherein we were charged to make the exodus from Egypt for frontlets between your eyes. [We are also to inscribe and enclose in the phylacteries the sections of] Sh'ma (Hear O Israel) [Deuteronomy 6:4-9] and V'haya im shamo'a (And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken) (ibid., 11: 13-21) because we are charged to have the commandments [of the Torah] also for frontlets between our eyes, as it is written: And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. This is why we also inscribe [on parchment] these two sections - [Sh'ma and V'haya im shamo'a] - for frontlets [even though the exodus is not mentioned in them], for they contain the commandments of the Unity of G-d, the memorial of all commandments, the doctrine of retribution, which states that the consequence of disobeying the commandments is punishment and that blessings come in the wake of obedience - and the whole foundation of the faith. Now of the phylactery of the arm, Scripture says, And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thy hand, which the Rabbis explained as 'referring to the left arm, which is opposite the heart.

By way of the Truth, [the mystic lore of the Cabala] the verse, It is because of 'zeh' (this) which the Eternal did for me, is similar to 'zeh' (this) is my G-d, and I will glorify Him. The verse here thus states that it was because of His name and His glory

that He did for us and brought us forth out of Egypt. And "this" shall be for a sign unto thee on the arm of your strength, just as it is written, For Thou art the glory of their strength. Thus the sign of the phylactery] is similar to the sign of circumcision and the Sabbath. And since all [emanations] are one perfect unity, which is alluded to in "the sign" on the arm, our ancestors have received the tradition from Moses, who received it from the mouth of the Almighty, that [all four sections of Scripture inscribed in the phylacteries, as described above], are encased in one compartment. This is something like Scripture says, achothi kalah, because it is united and comprised of the thirty-two paths of wisdom with which the world was created) and it is further written, His left hand is under my head.

Then Scripture says, And it shall be for a memorial between thine eyes, meaning that we are to lay them at the place of remembrance, which is between the eyes, at the beginning of the brain. It is there that remembrance begins by recalling the appearances [of persons and events] after they have passed away from us. These frontlets circle around the whole head with their straps, while the loop rests directly over the base of the brain, which guards the memory. And the expression, between your eyes, means that they are to be placed upon the middle of the head, not towards one side. It may be that in the middle of the head, there are the roots of the eyes and from these stems the power of sight. Similarly, the verse, Nor make ye any baldness between your eyes for the dead, I means baldness adjoining the forehead. Thus the expression between youreyes mentioned here in the case of the frontlets also refers to the identical place. It is to explain this point, i.e., that the phylactery of the head is not to be placed between the eyes, as the literal meaning of the words might indicate, but that it is to be placed

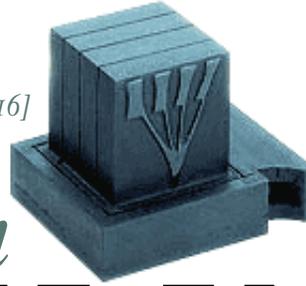
upon the middle of the head adjoining the forehead], that He reverts here [in Verse 16 and instead of using the expression, and for 'a memorial' between your eyes, as stated in Verse 9], and says 'ultotaphoth' between your eyes. This is in order to explain that the commandment is not fulfilled by placing the phylactery between the eyes bottomward, but rather it is to be placed high on the head where it is to be there like totaphoth, [and we have seen above that the word totaphoth was used by the Rabbis for an object which lies upon the head]. He uses the plural form [totaphoth, and not the singular totaphoth, because the compartments in the phylactery of the head are many, as we have received the form by Tradition.

And now I shall declare to you a general principle in the reason of many commandments. Beginning with the days of Enosh when idol-worship came into existence, opinions in the matter of faith fell into error. Some people denied the root of faith by saying that the world is eternal; they denied the Eternal, and said; It is not He [Who called forth the world into existence]. Others denied His knowledge of individual matters, and they say, How doth G-d know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? Some admit His knowledge but deny the principle of providence and make men as the fishes of the sea, [believing] that G-d does not watch over them and that there is no punishment or reward for their deeds, for they say the Eternal hath forsaken the land. Now when G-d is pleased to bring about a change in the customary and natural order of the world for the sake of a people or an individual, then the voidance of all these [false beliefs] becomes clear to all people, since a wondrous miracle shows that the world has a G-d Who created it, and Who knows and supervises it, and Who has the power to change it. And when that wonder

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[Exodus 13:16]



Ramban on TEFILIN

is previously prophesied by a prophet, another principle is further established, namely, that of the truth of prophecy, that G-d doth speak with man, and that He revealeth His counsel unto His servants the prophets, and thereby the whole Torah is confirmed. This is why Scripture says in connection with the wonders [in Egypt]: That thou [Pharaoh] mayest know that I am the Eternal in the midst of the earth, [Exod. 8:18] which teaches us the principle of providence, i.e., that G-d has not abandoned the world to chance, as they [the heretics] would have it; That thou mayest know that the earth is the Eternal's, [Exod. 9:29] which informs us of the principle of creation, for everything is His since He created all out of nothing; That thou mayest know that there is none like Me in all the earth, [Exod. 9:14] which indicates His might, i.e., that He rules over everything and that there is nothing to withhold Him. The Egyptians either denied or doubted all of these {three} principles, [and the miracles confirmed their truth]. Accordingly, it follows that the great signs and wonders constitute faithful witnesses to the truth of the belief in the existence of the Creator and the truth of the whole Torah. And because the Holy One, blessed be He, will not make signs and wonders in every generation for the eyes of some wicked man or heretic, He therefore commanded us that we should always make a memorial or sign of that which we have seen with our eyes, and that we should transmit the matter to our children, and their children to their children, to the generations to come, and He placed great emphasis on it, as is indicated by the fact that one is liable to extinction for eating leavened bread on the Passover, and for abandoning the Passover offering, [i.e., for not taking part in the slaughtering thereof]. He has further required of us that we inscribe upon our arms and between our eyes all that we have seen in the way of

signs and wonders, and to inscribe it yet upon the doorposts of the houses, and that we remember it by recital in the morning and evening - just as the Rabbis have said: "The recital of the benediction True and firm, [Which follows the Sh'ma in the morning and which terminates with a blessing to G-d for the redemption from Egypt], is obligatory as a matter of scriptural law because it is written, that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life". [He further required] that we make a booth every year, and many other commandments like them, which are a memorial to the exodus from Egypt. All these commandments are designed for the purpose that in all generations we should have testimonies to the wonders so that they should not be forgotten and so that the heretic should not be able to open his lips to deny the belief in [the existence of] G-d. He who buys a Mezuzah for one zuz [a silver coin] and affixes it to his doorpost and has the proper intent of heart on its content, has already admitted the creation of the world, the Creator's knowledge and His providence, and also his belief in prophecy as well as in all fundamental principles of the Torah, besides admitting that the mercy of the creator is very great upon them that do His Will, Since He brought us forth from that bondage to freedom and to great honor on account of the merit of our fathers who delighted in the rear of His Name. It is for this reason that the Rabbis have said: "Be as heedful of a light commandment, as of a weighty one...for they are all exceedingly precious and beloved, for through them a person always expresses thankfulness to his G-d.

And the purpose of an the commandments is that we believe in our G-d and be thankful to Him of having created us, for we know of no other reason for the first creation, and G-d the Most High has no

demand on the lower creatures," excepting that man should know and be thankful to G-d for having created him. The purposes of raising our voices in prayer and of the service in synagogues, as well as the merit of public prayer, is precisely this: that people should have a place wherein they assemble and express their thankfulness to G-d for having created them and supported them, and thus proclaim and say before Him, We are your Creatures. "

This is the intent of what the Rabbis of blessed memory have said: And they cried mightily unto G-d. From here you learn that prayer must be accompanied by sound. The undaunted one wins over the abashed one." Through the great open miracles, one comes to admit the hidden miracles which constitute the foundation of the whole Torah, for no one can have a part in the Torah of Moses our teacher unless he believes that all our words and our events, [as dictated in the Torah], are miraculous in scope, there being no natural or customary way of the world in them, whether affecting the public or the individual. Instead, if a person observes the commandments, His reward Will bring him success, and if he violates them, His punishment it will cause his extinction. It is all by decree of the Most High, as I have already mentioned. The hidden miracles done to the public come to be known as is mentioned in the assurances of the Torah on the subject of the blessings and imprecations, as the verse says: And all the nations Shall say: Wherefore hath the Eternal done thus unto this land? ... Then men shall say: Because they forsook the covenant of the Eternal, the C-d of their fathers. Thus it will become known to all nations that their punishment came from G-d. And of the fulfillment of the commandments it says, And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Eternal is called upon thee. I will yet explain this, with the help of G-d." □

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LECH LECHA

RABBI BERNARD FOX



Parshat Lech Lecha. Rashi relates that Avraham destroyed his father Terach's idols. Enraged, Terach brought Avraham in front of the king Nimrod to be tried for this heresy. Nimrod condemned Avraham to be thrown alive into a fiery furnace.

Avraham's brother, Haran, decided to test the veracity of Avraham's religion. If Avraham emerged unharmed from the fiery furnace, then Haran would proclaim his commitment to Avraham's G-d. If Avraham did not survive the furnace, he would retain his idolatrous beliefs. Avraham emerged from the furnace unscathed. Haran, consistent with his decision, declared his faith in Avraham's G-d, and he, too, was condemned to suffer the same punishment. However, unlike Avraham, the flames of the furnace consumed Haran.[1]

It is difficult to understand why Avraham and his brother, Haran, experienced such different fates. Why did Hashem intercede on behalf of Avraham, but allow Haran, who also proclaimed his faith in G-d, to be consumed? The answer lies in the difference between the nature of Avraham's commitment to G-d and Haran's conviction.

Maimonides writes that Avraham came to his understanding of G-d through a careful, lengthy analysis. Avraham studied the universe and its wonders. He was completely

convinced that there must be a Creator.[2] In contrast, Haran did not pursue this difficult, challenging path. His faith was based completely on a single observation, which he understood to be a sign from G-d. Although Haran and Avraham came to the same conclusion, the bases of their convictions were very different. Avraham's convictions were based upon a deep understanding of the universe and the Creator. He had been transformed by his convictions, and elevated to a higher spiritual level. Haran remained, to a great extent, the same person who existed prior to his religious conversion. As a result, Avraham's spiritual perfection resulted in his salvation. Haran, lacking Avraham's elevated state, was not saved.

“There was a famine in the land. Avram descended to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine in the land was severe.” (Beresheit 12:10)

Nachmanides maintains that Avraham sinned in his decision to leave the land of Israel and seek refuge in Egypt. Nachmanides asserts that Avraham also committed a second sin. While in Egypt, Avraham denied that Sara was his wife. He claimed that she was his sister. Avraham engaged in this deception, in order to protect himself from the Egyptians. He feared that

in order to seize Sara, the Egyptians might murder her husband, but as her brother he would be safe from harassment. According to Nachmanides, Avraham should have relied upon G-d's providence and assumed that he would be protected.[3]

The Talmud teaches us in Tractate Taanit that it is prohibited to rely upon miracles. Each individual is required to exercise common sense. We may not endanger ourselves needlessly with the hope of being saved by a miracle.[4] Why, then, did Avraham sin by traveling to Egypt and claiming that Sara was his sister? Both of these decisions reflect Avraham's determination to provide for his own safety, without relying on Divine intervention.

It seems that Hashem intended to demonstrate, through Avraham, a fundamental concept of the Torah. The Almighty is the Creator of the Universe. He is aware of all the intricate details of His creation. Furthermore, He will intervene with nature on behalf of His devoted children. Towards this end, G-d endeavored to demonstrate, through Avraham, the effects of His Providence. He made Avraham wealthy and mighty; He protected him from all harm. Because of this relationship, Avraham should have stayed in the land of Israel. He would have been protected, and

unharmed by the famine. Similarly, upon entering Egypt, Avraham should have acknowledged Sara as his wife. His frank honesty in the face of danger would have been rewarded. G-d would have protected Avraham from the aggression of the Egyptians. Remaining in the land of Israel and declaring Sara as his wife would have served as a demonstration G-d's Providence, in the most dangerous of situations, over his beloved.

In short, it is prohibited for a person to rely upon a miracle. However, Avraham had a unique mission. The Almighty wished to demonstrate His Providence through Avraham. Because Avraham abandoned the land of Israel and protected Sara though deceit, he denied Hashem the opportunity to demonstrate His influence over nature on behalf of Avraham.

“And the people of Sedom were very evil and sinned greatly against Hashem.” (Beresheit 13:13)

Lote departed from his uncle Avraham. Lote decided to resettle, with his family and possessions, in Sedom. The Chumash comments that the people of this city were very evil.

The commentaries provide various explanations for the insertion of this criticism of the citizens of Sedom. One explanation, offered by Rashi, is

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LECH LECHA

RABBI BERNARD FOX

that the Torah is commenting on Lote. Lote knew these people were evil. Yet, he decided to live among them.[5]

Lote is one of the most misunderstood individuals in the Chumash. He was not a tzadik on the level of Avraham. However, he was far from evil. He risked his life, on at least two occasions, in order to protect others. Hashem also rewarded him with progeny that developed into two great nations. It seems that Lote was essentially a righteous person. If so why, did he settle in Sedom?

Lote can best be understood in contrast to Avraham. Avraham followed Hashem whole-heartedly. He did not experience any conflict. All aspects of his personality were devoted to the objective of serving Hashem. In contrast, Lote served Hashem through exerting self-control over his desires. He understood that there was a Creator and that we must devote ourselves to His will. However, this was not easy for Lote. He struggled with internal conflicts.

Lote's conflict is evidenced in this decision. He felt more comfortable

with the people of Sedom than with Avraham. Latter, when Lote flees Sedom, he chooses to avoid rejoining his uncle. This decision also indicates Lote's conflict.

"Hashem spoke to Avram after Lote separated from him: 'Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, to the north, south, east and west.'" (Beresheit 13:14)

This passage is the introduction to G-d's promise to Avraham that his descendants will become numerous and possess the land of Israel. As the pasuk indicates, this prophecy did not occur until Avraham had separated himself from his nephew Lote.

The Midrash tells us of a dispute between Rav Yudah and Rav Nechemya concerning this prophecy and Avraham's separation from Lote. Rav Yudah maintains that the Almighty was angered by Avraham's treatment of his nephew. Although Avraham sent Lote away because of Lote's improper behavior, Rav Yudah maintains that this was not the proper response. Instead, Avraham should have worked to

improve Lote. Avraham's mission was to change the attitudes and behavior of humankind. This responsibility began with his own family members.

Rav Nechemya maintains that Avraham acted correctly when he sent Lote away. Lote's behavior reflected poorly upon his uncle Avraham, and it interfered with Avraham's objective of reintroducing humanity to the worship of the Almighty. Only after the obstacle of Lote's behavior was removed did Avraham merit this prophecy.[6]

It seems that Rav Yudah and Rav Nechemya differ on the meaning of an ambiguous phrase in our passage.

The pasuk states that Hashem spoke to Avraham "after Lote separated from him". According to Rav Yudah, the term "after" means that substantial time passed between Avraham's separation from Lote and this prophecy. This implies that this separation was inappropriate. As a consequence, the Almighty withheld prophecy from Avraham. However according to Rav Nechemya the term "after" means immediately following the separation. The prophecy occurred directly upon Avraham's separation from Lote. According to this view, Avraham acted properly in separating from Lote. He was immediately rewarded with an important prophecy

This dispute can be understood on a deeper level. Rav Yudah and Rav Nechemya seem to disagree on the nature of Avraham's mission to

reeducate society. According to Rav Nechemya Avraham's obligation stemmed from his duty to serve G-d. In the framework of one's personal relationship with the Almighty personal needs, and even devotion to family, must take a secondary role. Avraham – clearly demonstrated this concept through his willingness to sacrifice his son, Yitzchak. Lote's behavior interfered with Avraham's duty to serve Hashem. It was incumbent upon Avraham to remove this obstacle.

However, Rav Yudah maintains that Avraham's obligation stemmed from a duty to show kindness to humanity. From the perspective of kindness, family and relatives must assume priority. If this was the source of Avraham's obligation, then his duty to reform Lote was of primary importance. Avraham's abandonment of Lote was a failure to demonstrate kindness. As a result prophecy was withheld. □

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 11:28.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Ramban / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avodot Kochavim 1:3.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:10.

[4] Mesechet Taanit 20b.

[5] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 13:13.

[6] Midrash Rabba, Sefer Beresheit 41:8.

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MIKVA

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Why must a woman immerse herself in a mikva - a naturally collected body of water - upon the completion of her period, and a subsequent count of seven days where no blood was seen? Women from both religious and irreligious circles find fault with Judaism, citing Mikva as their first accusation. I believe mikva is abandoned out of ignorance, and a false sense of self degradation.

The concept of a mikva is that one go through a process of "change" at a certain juncture. Mikva is not applicable to women alone. The High Priest would immerse many times between changing his vestments, although he was not filthy. A man who had a nocturnal emission, or a one completing his or her conversion would also immerse. The Talmud states that one who converts is like a newborn child. (Rabbi Kaplan) Additionally, upon purchasing new vessels, one must immerse them as a distancing from the heathen from whom he purchased them. Again, we see immersion as a method of changing the status if the immersed.

Mikva carries no powers, nor does it make something clean. Rather, the immersed undergoes a status change, or an act of readiness. If one does not intend that the mikva produce a change, the immersing does nothing. Intent is part of the act, teaching that the water itself has no inherent powers or properties. One must desire a new state, or else, his immersion produces no change.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan in "Waters of Eden" cites some interesting parallels. He states that one who emerges from water, is akin to a newborn. A Rabbi once suggested that when Pharaoh's daughter lifted Moses from the Nile River, it explained her psychological attachment to Moses as her own. This act of 'lifting him from water', was identified by her unconsciously as an act of 'birth'. Emerging from a body of water, moves the immersed to a new state of existence. Rabbi Kaplan also suggests that water is a substance in which one cannot breath, and his emergence afterwards is as though life started anew. Again, pointing to a change of status, not a cleaning process.

In addition to the mikva changing one's state, there is another benefit regarding marriage. The separation of twelve days between husband and wife, is terminated through the wife's immersion. This absence of physical contact, and certainly intercourse, provides a marriage with a renewal of mutual interest. Marriages are affected negatively when sexual intercourse is over indulged. As all things indulged in excess, marriage partners become bored of each other, and fantasize of others. Separation and subsequent immersion renew the marriage, and secure the marriage bond each month.

Some women feel degraded by this command of mikva. Perhaps the idea of being commanded to unclot one's self generates the underlying resistance. This is certainly a humbling act. Nudity exposes a purely animalistic aspect of man. A psychologically healthy individual does not desire to face this aspect of himself.

We learn that during Purim, Queen Vashti tormented the Jewish women by forcing them to work in the nude. Vashti desired to expose herself at the party when summoned by her King Achashverosh, but the Talmud states she didn't, as "Gabriel attached a tail to her". What does this mean? It means that a tail - the one organ possessed by animals and not man - symbolizes Vashti's own instincts. A tail is definitively "animal", as opposed to any other organ. She wished to expose herself, but she had a stronger desire: not to admit to her animalistic side. Perhaps mikva, on some level, awakens this animalistic self-identity, and one rebels from conforming to this command. Perhaps, in part, the Torah's command of mikva seeks to force man's instinctual side to be in line with his intelligence. His animalistic identity, now exposed, follows G-d's word. This certainly would explain the elevation of one's status achieved through mikva. One takes himself in the capacity of "instinctual", and immerses in mikva, thereby subjugating the instincts to G-d's word.

There may be one other stressful aspect associated with mikva, which also contributes to a woman's reluctance to follow this law. Mikva arrives at the conclusion a woman's monthly cycle. She visits a mikva due to this cycle. The menstrual cycle is accompanied by hormonal changes, and the sight of blood. A woman may look upon her blood with a sense of loss, filthiness, or even death. It is not a pleasant time physically, or psychologically. It is something to "endure" until it has past. Although she has completed her cycle, when entering a mikva, a woman may now feel she is 'revisiting' this period. Mikva then becomes distasteful, as it is an "act", a public admission, of this endured experience. By not visiting mikva each month, a woman successfully leaves behind her distasteful week. But on the contrary, mikva is not tied exclusively with one's period, as we mentioned. Mikva should not be viewed negatively, for these reasons. One must be sensitive to those issues which falsely accuse mikva of possessing negative aspects.

Torah laws target a preferred state in man. From wearing Tefilin and eating only Kosher foods, to celebrating holidays and abstaining from work on the Sabbath, G-d's wisdom decreed these acts as a means of tempering man's values towards the most enjoyable and perfected life. We must not wrongfully associate our "pain" in not being allowed to act as we please, with a corrupt Torah system. If we trust a doctor with our bodies, we must certainly trust G-d with our souls.

Possessing knowledge of G-d's laws is the only method for replacing our distasteful, erroneous opinions, with the true and pleasant concepts designed by G-d. When anyone of us detects any Torah law as something to avert, we must embrace those laws with study, until we understand the true concepts contained, that appeal to our minds. Such concepts will replace our ignorant aversion, with intelligent anticipation. □

