

Does God Wear Tefillin? A Brief Talmudic Theological Study

Shavu'ot – 5780-2020

1. The Shema – Deuteronomy 6:4-9

<p>Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.</p>	<p>שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד: וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדֶךָ: וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל-לִבְבְּךָ: וּשְׁנַנְתָּם לְבְנֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלַכְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ: וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאָזְנוֹת עַל-יָדֶיךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפוֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ: וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:</p>
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2. Talmud Berachot 6a & b

Rabbi Avin bar Rav Adda said that Rabbi Yitzhak said: From where is it derived that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wears phylacteries? As it is stated: “The Lord has sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength” (Isaiah 62:8). Since it is customary to swear upon holy objects, it is understood that His right hand and the arm of His strength are the holy objects upon which God swore. Specifically, “His right hand” refers to the Torah, as it is stated in describing the giving of the Torah: “From His right hand, a fiery law for His people” (Deuteronomy 33:2). “The arm of His strength,” His left hand, refers to phylacteries, as it is stated: “The Lord gave strength to His nation” (Psalms 29:11), in the form of the mitzva of phylacteries...Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said to Rav Hiyya bar Avin: What is written in the phylacteries of the Master of the world? Rav Hiyya bar Avin replied: It is written: “Who is like Your people, Israel, one nation in the land?” (I Chronicles 17:21)... Rav Aha, son of Rava said to Rav Ashi: It works out well with regard to the contents of one of the four compartments of God’s phylacteries of the head. However, all four compartments of Israel’s phylacteries of the head contain portions of the Torah that praise God. What portions in praise of Israel are written in the rest

of the compartments of God’s phylacteries of the head? Rav Ashi said to him: In those three compartments it is written: “For who is a great nation, to whom God is close, like the Lord our God whenever we call upon Him?” (Deuteronomy 4:7); “And who is a great nation, who has righteous statutes and laws, like this entire Torah which I set before you today?” (Deuteronomy 4:8); “Happy are you, Israel, who is like you? A people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and that is the sword of your excellence. And your enemies shall dwindle away before you, and you shall tread upon their high places” (Deuteronomy 33:29); “Or has God attempted to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and by wonders” (Deuteronomy 4:34); “And to elevate you above all nations that He has made, in praise, in name and in glory; that you may be a holy people to the Lord, your God, as He has spoken” (Deuteronomy 26:19). Rav Aḥa, son of Rava, raises an objection: If all of these verses are included in God’s phylacteries of the head, there are too many compartments as more than four verses of praise were listed. Rather, the portions in God’s phylacteries must be arranged as follows: The verses “For who is a great nation” and “And who is a great nation” are included in one compartment, as they are similar. “Happy are you, Israel” and “Who is like your people, Israel” are in one compartment. “Or has God attempted” is in one compartment and “And to elevate you” is in one compartment in the phylacteries of the head, where there are four separate compartments. And all of the verses are written together on one parchment in the phylacteries of the arm, which has only one compartment.

3. From the prayer, Hymn of Glory – אנעים זמירות

<p>[God] showed the tefillin knot to the humble one [Moses], the image of God in front of his eyes.</p>	<p>קִשְׁרַת תְּפִלִּין הִרְאָה לְעֵינָיו. תְּמוּנַת ה' לְנֶגֶד עֵינָיו:</p>
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