



## Yeshivat Har Etzion – Israel Koschitzky VBM Parsha Digest, Year IV, #21 Parashat Beshalach 5782

Selected and Adapted by Rabbi Dov Karoll

### Quote from the Rosh Yeshiva

Seeing the Egyptians causes Bnei Yisrael to fear them, and seeing God's hand leads them to fear God. The question of whom to fear thus depends on where one looks and what one sees. As they stand at the sea, Bnei Yisrael are facing the water, with the Egyptians at their backs. When they look backwards, they fear Pharaoh and his army. When they look forwards, towards God's deliverance and His great hand, they fear Him. A person is not at the mercy of his fears; he can choose to look in the right direction and to draw confidence from what he sees. -Harav Yaakov Medan

### Parashat Beshalach "Chok U-Mishpat"

By Harav Yehuda Amital zt"l



Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-beshalach/chok-u-mishpat>

How far does the honor of parents extend? Rav Eliezer replied, Go forth and see what a certain non-Jew named Dama ben Netina did in Ashkelon... The Sages sought jewels for the efod, and were willing to pay him a profit of 600,000 gold dinars. But since the key to the jewel-box was lying under his father's pillow, and his father was asleep, Dama did not trouble him. The following year God gave him his reward: a para aduma (red heifer) was born to his herd. When the Sages went to him to buy it, he said to them, "I know that even if I asked you for all the money in the world, you would pay me. But I ask of you only the money I lost for my father's honor."

Why was he rewarded with a para aduma? Kibbud av va-em (respecting one's parents) is a classic example of a comprehensible mitzva. Para aduma, on the other hand, is the classic example of a mitzva which we cannot understand. Even Shlomo Ha-Melekh, the wisest of men, said that comprehension of para aduma was beyond him. What Dama ben Netina lost because of his observance of a rational mitzva, he gained because of a non-rational one. While non-Jews can reach high levels of morality through observing rational commandments, Judaism adds a new dimension of holiness through the observance of divine commandments which we cannot always fathom.

Western culture today, and especially American culture, is based upon personal autonomy and individual rights. Judaism, however, recognizes that man is not totally autonomous – he is subject to God's will. Therefore, Judaism focuses on duties instead of rights. Furthermore, Judaism acknowledges that God's comprehension is beyond ours, and therefore we must obey His laws even when we do not understand them. This is an especially important message in our day.

Once I was approached by a couple who wished to become religious, but didn't know where to start. I told them that in Parashat Beshalach we read that at Mara, 3 days after splitting the sea, "There He gave them law and statute" (Shemot 15:25). Rashi explains, based on the gemara in Sanhedrin, that this means that God commanded the Jews to observe 3 mitzvot even BEFORE receiving the rest of the Torah at Sinai. The 3 mitzvot were Shabbat, para aduma, and dinim (which Rashi later explains to refer to kibbud av va-em). I advised them to follow the precedent in Parashat Beshalach:

1. Start by observing Shabbat. If it is too hard to be a Jew 7 days a week, then try at least 1 day a week.
2. Pick any mitzva bein adam le-chaveiro such as kibbud av va-em and observe it scrupulously. It is important to stress that Halakha does not relate only to matters between man and God, but also legislates interpersonal ethics.
3. Para aduma: you must choose a mitzva which you don't understand and observe it as well. One must realize that despite all the rationale behind the mitzvot, ultimately we cannot understand everything and we do not base our observance only on our



rational appreciation of the mitzvot.

(Originally delivered on Shabbat Parashat Beshalach 5756. Summarized by Reuven Ziegler.)

## Parashat Beshalach

### “Beshalach – What?”

By Rav Ezra Bick



Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-beshalach/beshalach-what>

Let us ask the question the Jews asked in the desert, when they first encountered the manna: “The Israelites saw, and they said to each other, ‘WHAT (mann) is it,’ for they did not know what it was” (16:15).

I would like to reframe the question slightly. What is the point of having manna fall from the sky, with its special quality of being unhoardable? What is the reason that the manna is connected to Shabbat observance? What is the meaning of the manna, within the context of the narrative of Parashat Beshalach?

#### A. Some questions

Parashat Ha-man is contained in chapter 16 of Sefer Shemot. Let us first examine the verses and list the apparent anomalies and difficulties.

1. 16:1: “They traveled from Eilim, and the entire congregation of the children of Israel came to the desert of Sin, which is between Eilim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month of their exodus from Egypt.” Why are the location and the time spelled out so extensively? In neither of the previous 2 stops do we find comparable specificity (see 15:22, 27) of either a date or an attempt to locate the station within the larger geographic picture.
2. 16:2: “The entire congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moshe and Aharon in the desert.” There is something missing here. This verse should have been preceded by a statement that there was no food in Midbar Sin, or that their original stores ran out, as it notes that they ran out of water in Mara (15:23) and in Refidim (17:1) before noting the complaint (17:2). Why in our case is the complaint not explicated?
3. What is indicated by “...Israel complained... IN THE DESERT”? We already know that the location is “the desert of Sin.” Naturally, if they complained, it was in the desert. Why does the Torah append this location to the complaint?
4. 16:4-13: The complaint is followed by a confusing list of speeches of God, Moshe and Aharon. First, God tells Moshe that He will send down the manna to be collected every day except Friday, when there will be a double portion. Then, Moshe and Aharon tell the Jews that God will hear their complaint, but that it should not be directed to them. Third, Moshe seems to repeat the same message. Fourth, Moshe tells Aharon to gather the Jews before God. Fifth, God tells Moshe that he will give the Jews meat in the evening and bread in the morning. Sixth, after the manna falls, Moshe explains the rules for collecting it, without mentioning Shabbat. God then promises meat by evening, and the camp is covered by quail.

Regarding the quail: there is no further reference to it, nor are we told of the people’s reaction to this event, even though previously Moshe had predicted that “in the evening, and you shall know that God has taken you out of Egypt.” What is the status and meaning of the quail, especially in relation to the manna, which is described at length and clearly is at the center of the story?

#### B. No food?

Let us start from the second and third questions. The Ramban suggests that the answer to the second is found in the third. The Jews “complained... in the desert” means that their complaint was caused by their being in the desert. This might be understood to be a shorthand way of saying that they had no food, since the desert is associated with a shortage of food. But even if that were the case, I would expect the Torah to state that “there was nothing to eat,” as it does when there is no water. Rather, I suggest that there was, at that moment, plenty of food. It was the fact that they were entering the desert, with no assured supply of food IN THE FUTURE, that led to the complaints. It was not hunger, but uncertainty, that caused the unrest.

In fact, the desert is not necessarily a place without food. More importantly, the Jews were only a few weeks from Egypt, and they had originally planned a trip that would take at least that long. Even the short route (“the way of the land of the Philistines”) would have necessitated a trek of several weeks. If we assume that their immediate goal is Mt. Sinai (as God promised Moshe in Shemot 3:12), they still have some distance to go, and presumably they should have prepared food. We know that they had their flocks with them, and there is, as



yet, apparently no shortage of water. So why are they complaining about imminent death from starvation?

The answer is not that they are feeling hunger but that they are scared. In the desert, it is difficult to know where your food will come from. They are no longer sure of the path (since they are not on the “way of the land of the Philistines”), and they are now “in the middle of nowhere” (between Eilim and Sinai). They lack not food but faith.

This is indicated by the picturesque language used to describe Egypt – the pot of meat. The contrast between the desert and Egypt is between a land of unknown resources and a full pot. They remember not full bellies but a full pot, namely, the assurance of food tomorrow. This is what they find so disturbing – not the lack of food per se, but the lack of a pot brimming with an abundance of food. What was so special about Egypt was that there was always food, and THAT is what they miss.

We cannot be sure that they always ate well in Egypt, for, as slaves, they might have been deprived by their masters. But they surely had enough to survive and continue working, and they had no fear for the future in that respect.

This assurance of tomorrow’s meal without necessarily being richly fed now, is the essence of being a slave. The slave has no riches of his own, but he relies on his master, who is rich. The complaint of the Jews when they reach the desert is a direct expression of their slave mentality, and their memories of Egypt are nostalgia for the security of enslavement. To a slave, whose meal comes predictably from his master, the desert is truly a terrifying place, even if at the moment he still has food in his hands.

We can now answer the first question. The geographic location is “the desert of Sin, which is between Eilim and Sinai;” in other words, halfway between a place of abundant food (70 palms and 12 springs) and their direct goal, Sinai. The timeframe is “on the fifteenth day of the second month of their exodus from Egypt,” halfway between crossing the sea and the revelation of Sinai. (It was a midpoint in the count of the months. They left in the first month, the Torah is given in the third, and this is the middle of the second month). The Torah stresses the feeling of “being in the middle” – away from Egypt, but not yet at their goal. The open-ended future, cut off from their origin but not yet in sight of their destination, between worlds, as it were, is the background to their situation. The actual distance from Egypt is not great, nor is the time that has transpired sufficient to exhaust their food-supply, but mentally, psychologically, they are halfway from everywhere.

### C. What is it?

The manna is God’s answer to this complaint. We know the special conditions of the manna – it fell every morning, but could not be stored for the next day. Everyone received the same amount. The attempt to hoard resulted in its becoming wormy and ruined. God explicitly tells Moshe that this is not merely a blessing but a “test” (nisayon) – “will they follow My Torah or not” (16:4). Rashi explains this test as referring to the laws associated with the manna. I submit, following the Ibn Ezra (16:4), that it refers to the relationship of the Jews to God in the desert. “‘In order to test them’ – because they will need Me every day.” The Manna is, in a sense, a recreation of the assured dependence of the slave on his master, with God having replaced the Egyptian master. However, because God is not a natural cause, and His bounty cannot be seen with the natural assurance that the overflowing Nile gives to the population of Egypt, this is a test of faith. The manna will fall daily without failure, God promises, and you will be dependent on that promise, because you cannot accumulate manna and save it. The experience of the manna is an education, training the Jews to have faith in the providence of God, weaning them from a dependence on hoarding, which might have been a natural reaction to their separation from the fleshpots of Egypt.

This helps us understand the link between the manna and Shabbat. One message of Shabbat is that everything must be prepared beforehand. On Shabbat one does not accumulate, but relies on what has been prepared. This message is explicated in our parasha – “On the sixth day, they shall prepare that which they shall bring” (16:5). Shabbat is, for all generations, a small trial of dependence, where one enjoys what one has without gathering for the morrow. Imagine the feeling of the recently released slave, when finally, on the sixth day, he has put aside a small security for a day he knows will come – and then, on the next day, Shabbat, he must eat his savings and go back to living on the edge of penury! Naturally, he can barely resist and goes out and tries to gather on the Shabbat, to protect his savings (see v. 27).

This lies at the heart of the mysterious unknown nature of the manna as well. Were the manna to be a familiar food, no matter how unexpected initially, the Jews would come to view it as the natural food of this desert. It would become a natural resource, a form of security for the inhabitants of the desert. But God wishes the Jews to remain on the edge of insecurity, with the desert remaining a land that does not provide assured food. Hence, manna is not the food of the desert but “bread from the heavens” (4), and all the



Jews can say when they encounter it is “what!?” What is it – its name is a question. “Mann hu?” – what is it? Therefore “The house of Israel called it mann” (31).

#### D. Manna and Quail

In Moshe’s initial speech to the Jews, he tells them that there will be meat in the evening and bread in the morning. That indeed takes place – quail covers the camp in the evening and the manna in the morning. We do not find the quail mentioned again except in exceptional circumstances (see Bemidbar 11). This parasha concludes with the statement, “The Israelites ate manna for 40 years, until they arrived at an inhabited land, they ate manna until they arrived at the edge of the land of Canaan” (35). While this does not necessarily mean that they ate nothing else, it seems to imply that was their only regular food. What happened to the quail, and what was the purpose of its falling in the evening?

To answer this, we have to follow closely the multiple speeches of God and Moshe in the beginning of the story (question 4). When God first responds to the complaint of the people, He does not mention the quail. “Now I am going to rain down bread from the heaven, and the people shall go out to gather every day’s amount” (4). At this point, God mentions that on the sixth day there will be a double portion. Moshe and Aharon then speak to the people, and, for the first time and without apparent command from God, tell them that in the evening they will understand that God has taken them out of Egypt, while in the morning they will see God’s glory (7-8). Moshe then makes explicit the meaning of “evening and morning,” telling them, “when God gives you meat in the evening and bread in the morning in satiation, when God shall hear your complaints which you complain against Him, but who are we; your complaints are not against us but against God” (8). Only after Aharon gathers the people do we find God explaining this to Moshe (see v. 12).

What is happening here? Apparently, there are 2 different issues. One is the faith issue described above, which God answers with the manna, emphasizing Shabbat. But Moshe and Aharon seized on another issue. The Jews complained to Moshe and Aharon, placing responsibility for their plight on their shoulders. “Would that we had died by the HAND OF GOD in the land of Egypt... for YOU have taken us out to this desert, to kill all this congregation by hunger” (3). Moshe perceives a religious error here. The Jews fail to see the guiding hand of God in the exodus and through the desert. Moshe therefore admonishes the people, telling them that their complaint is not against him and Aharon, but against God. Moshe emphasizes that when they see the miracles of the quail and the manna, they will “know that God has taken you out of Egypt” (6). The manna seem to be the basic answer to the slave mentality of the Jews, which is not so much a sin as a condition. God gives the manna as a gift. The quail, on the other hand, although food, carries a rebuke, similar to what happens in Parashat Behaalotekha, when the Jews rebel against the regimen of the manna and God bombards them with quail (Bemidbar 11). The purpose of the quail is to correct the theological transgression and to show them that God is in charge of their destiny. Precisely because the quail is a natural solution (though sent miraculously), it demonstrates God’s mastery over NATURE, and thus His responsibility for their fate. The manna, on the other hand, shows that God’s servants are beyond the bounds of nature and are fed directly from “His table.”

How could Moshe and Aharon have promised the quail if God did not first tell them? The answer presumably is that God DID tell them. Yet, the Torah gives the impression that God is initially only concerned with the manna and its message of dependence on God, whereas Moshe and Aharon focus on the problem which concerns them directly, the misplaced “blame” and responsibility which the Jews place on them.

This difference between the message of the quail and the message of the manna is hinted at even in the language with which Moshe introduces the double miracle.

Moshe and Aharon said to all the Israelites: Evening, and you shall know that God has taken you out of Egypt (6). And morning, and you shall see the glory of God, when He hears your complaints against God.... (7)

As Rashi points out (quoting the Sages), the first verse contains a note of displeasure, especially compared to the second. The evening is directed to correcting the theological error. The morning, by contrast, contains an element of religious inspiration – you shall witness the glory of God! The Sages state that the evening is “not with a shining face” and the morning is with “a shining face.” Their complaint in terms of food is met graciously by God in the morning. The evening is not an answer to their complaint, but only a lesson in who is in charge.

Since there is a difference between God’s main concern and Moshe’s, the conversations between them and the people become



rather convoluted. First God speaks to Moshe about the manna (and Shabbat), then Moshe and Aharon speak to the people, stressing the proper address for their complaints, then, after they bring the people to the proper address, gathering them to hear the word of God, God appears and adopts their double plan. Once the morning dawns and the Jews experience the manna, the primacy of God's plan is manifest, as the rest of the parasha deals exclusively with the manna and its ramifications.

I think there are 2 reasons for the primacy of manna over the quails. The first is that it is genuinely more central, going to the main purpose of the exodus – to turn the nation of slaves into the servants of God, a crucial precondition for receiving the Torah. Recognizing God's leadership of Jewish destiny can wait – perhaps until they are about to enter the Land of Israel and begin political life.

The second reason, which may partially contradict the first, is that the message of the quail was not absorbed right away. The Jews continued to turn to Moshe as the source of their problems and to consider him responsible for what happens in the desert. In the case of the golden calf, this is especially evident, as they turned to Aharon, concerned about what happened to “Moshe, WHO TOOK US OUT OF EGYPT” (32:1), and then making a golden calf, of which they said, “THIS IS YOUR GOD ISRAEL, WHO TOOK YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT” (32:4).

This perception of Moshe as the leader and decision-maker in the desert continues to be expressed throughout the events in the desert and the complaints of Sefer Bemidbar, until the original generation disappears. God's plan turns out to be correct. First one must take Egypt out of the soul of the Jews; only then can they reach full recognition of God's mastery of nature and their destiny.

## **Avodat Hashem – Foundations of Divine Service**

### **Shiur #50 – The Tefillin of Israel and God's Tefillin:**

#### **The Mitzva of Tefillin (Part IV)**

By Harav Baruch Gigi



Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/topical-issues-thought/tefillin-israel-and-gods-tefillin-mitzva>

#### **I. God's Tefillin**

R. Avin bar R. Ada said in the name of R. Yitzchak: How do you know that the Holy One, blessed is He, puts on tefillin? For it is stated: “The Lord has sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength” (Yeshayahu 62:8). “By His right hand” – this is the Torah, as it is stated: “At His right hand was a fiery law to them” (Devarim 33:2). “And by the arm of His strength” – this is the tefillin, as it is stated: “The Lord will give strength to His people” (Tehilim 29:11). And how do you know that the tefillin are a strength to Israel? As it is written: “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they shall be afraid of you” (Dev. 28:10), and it has been taught: R. Eliezer the Great says: This refers to the tefillin of the head.

R. Nachman bar Yitzchak said to R. Chiya bar Avin: What is written in the tefillin of the Master of the Universe? He replied to him: “And who is like Your people Israel, a nation 1 in the earth” (I Divrei Ha-Yamim 17:21). Does, then, the Holy One, blessed is He, sing the praises of Israel? Yes, as it is written: “You have avouched the Lord this day... and the Lord has avouched you this day” (Dev. 26:17-18). The Holy One, blessed is He, said to Israel: You have made me a unique entity in the world, and I shall make you a unique entity in the world...

R. Acha bar Raba said to R. Ashi: This accounts for 1 case [of tefillin]; what about the other cases? He replied to him: [They contain the following verses]: “For what great nation is there, etc.”; “And what great nation is there, etc.” (Dev. 4:7-8); “Happy are you, O Israel, etc.” (Dev. 33:9); “Or has God assayed, etc.” (Dev. 4:34); and “To make you high above all nations” (Dev. 26:19). If so, there would be too many cases? Hence [you must say]: “For what great nation is there,” and “And what great nation is there,” which are similar, are in 1 case; “Happy are you, O Israel,” and “Who is like Your people,” in 1 case; “Or has God assayed,” in 1 case; and “To make you high,” in 1 case. And all these verses are written on [the tefillin of] His arm. (Berakhot 6a)

The tefillin worn by God express His great love for Israel. By wearing tefillin, God exalts Israel and sets them at the peak of creation. God, as it were, created His world solely for Israel, who are referred to as the “first” (reishit).

This mutual laying of tefillin expresses reciprocity; each side in this holy covenant glorifies the other. As the gemara formulates this idea: “You have made me a unique entity in the world, and I shall make you a unique entity in the world.”

By wearing tefillin on our heads and our arms, we proclaim the unity of God's name through the words, “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is 1,” emphasizing His absolute unity, meaning that no force operates in the world other than Him. Thus, we



establish God's supreme unity, according to which all of creation is contained in Him. We declare that God is the only thing that exists in the world and there is nothing other than Him.

In God's tefillin, He singles out His nation Israel, "And who is like Your people Israel, a nation 1 in the earth." The people of Israel are God's chariot, the 1 nation in the world that gives full expression to God's kingdom on earth. The people of Israel openly declare that the name of the glory of God's kingdom is present in the world. This is the virtue of Israel, who crown God as king in this world.

The significance of the difference between the 2 unities, the supreme unity and the lower unity, finds expression in the following possibilities: Do we negate all of creation and include it in God's existence, or is it the creation that makes God's existence present in His world and crowns Him as king in that reality? Supreme unity relates to God's essence, there being nothing outside of Him. Lower unity, on the other hand, relates to God's creatures, who recognize His kingdom and view Him as the sole king of the universe.

The tefillin fully reflect these 2 unities and the subtle, delicate connection between them. The tefillin worn by the people of Israel present and emphasize the 1 God, there being nothing outside of Him. With these tefillin, we praise Him and crown him with the upper crown as the absolute One, there being nothing outside of Him. In the tefillin worn by God, God praises His people, who crown Him and recognize His kingdom in this world, and together they express the harmony and perfection of God's world.

This midrash expresses the perfect reciprocity between God and the people of Israel. This reciprocity is expressed through the assertion that even God wears, as it were, tefillin on His head and on His arm, and that even His tefillin have 4 passages in the 4 cases on his head and in the single case on His arm.

## II. The Tefillin Worn on the Arm and the Tefillin Worn on the Head

R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin discusses the relationship between the tefillin worn on the arm and the tefillin worn on the head. He bases his remarks on the gemara's statement in connection with the verse in the book of Esther (8:16): "The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor."

"Honor" – this refers to tefillin. And similarly it is stated: "And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they shall be afraid of you" (Devarim 28:10). And it was taught: R. Eliezer the Great says: This refers to the tefillin of the head. (Megilla 16b)

R. Tzadok explains (Likutei Ma'amarim, Purim 4) that honor refers to tefillin because they link Israel to God – as the tefillin of Israel affirm God's unity, while God's tefillin affirm Israel's singularity. The tefillin of the arm, worn opposite the heart, relate to prayer, service of the heart, which connect to the unity achieved through prayer. There is also unity through Torah and Shema, where one accepts Torah and mitzvot, and this is achieved through the tefillin of the head, worn opposite the brain.

Man's service of God derives from 2 sources and is based on 2 fundamental pillars: prayer and Torah, the service of the heart and the service of the mind and brain. The tefillin of the arm correspond to the service of the heart, to prayer. Therefore, it says about them: "And they shall be for you a sign," and Chazal expound: "And not for others a sign." Personal service of the heart, which expresses one's individual connection to God through the pouring out of his heart to Him, should remain in the private domain of the relationship between each person and his Maker.

On the other hand, the tefillin of the head correspond to the service of the mind and the brain through the study of Torah, which is God's wisdom. Thus, it says about it (Berakhot 6a):

"And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you; and they shall be afraid of You" (Devarim 28:10). And R. Eliezer the Great said: These are the tefillin of the head.

The tefillin of the head are visible to all, in the sense of: "A man's wisdom makes his face shine" (Kohelet 8:1). The light of God's wisdom that bursts forth from one who studies Torah can find expression in the tefillin that are worn on one's head for all to see, as they illustrate the person's connection to God through His wisdom and Torah.

God's tefillin also give expression to 2 aspects of the connection between God and His people Israel, the tefillin of the arm and the tefillin of the head, as is mentioned in that gemara. The tefillin of the arm reveal God's desire for the prayers of the righteous, so that He might provide them with His bounty. The tefillin of the head reveal the essential connection between God and Israel through His wisdom and Torah. Israel, the Torah, and the Holy One, blessed is He, are one (Zohar, Vayikra, Acharei Mot 73a-b). This is the highest level of devotion through tefillin.

This mutual connection between Israel and God, and between God and Israel, expressed in tefillin, is an unbreakable bond,



despite the passage of time. This is what Chazal said about God's revelation to Moshe in the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf, "And you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen" (Shemot 33:23): "R. Chana bar Bizna said in the name of R. Shimon the Pious: This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed is He, showed Moshe the knot of the tefillin" (Berakhot 7a).

The author of the Mei Ha-Shiloach writes in Parashat Ki-Tisa that tefillin allude to our unbreakable connection to the Almighty. The praise for Israel in God's tefillin affirms that Israel remains connected to Him and loved by Him even if they sin.

### III. Tefillin on Shabbat and Yom Tov

The gemara in Menachot (36b) records the views of the Tanna'im who say that one does not don tefillin on Shabbat or Yom Tov: For it was taught: It is written: "And you shall observe this ordinance in its season from day to day" (Shemot 13:10); "day," but not night; "from day," but not all days; hence the Shabbat and Yom Tov are excluded. These are the words of R. Yose the Galilean. But R. Akiva says:... One might have thought that a man should put on the tefillin on Shabbat and on Yom Tov. Scripture therefore says: "And it shall be for a sign upon your hand, and for frontlets between your eyes" (Shemot 13:16), that is, [only on those days] which stand in need of a sign [are tefillin to be worn], but Shabbat and Yom Tov are excluded, since they themselves are a sign.

According to R. Akiva, who maintains that a "sign" exempts one from tefillin, we must examine what the "sign" is that exempts one from putting on tefillin on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Rashi explains (Eiruvim 96a) that we wear tefillin on days that Israel needs a "sign" to show that they keep the Torah. This is not true of Shabbat and Yom Tov which are themselves a sign, as the verse calls Shabbat a sign (Shemot 31:13).

However, we do not find that Yom Tov is explicitly referred to in the Torah as a sign. The Rambam explains (Hilkhos Shabbat 29:18) that just as kiddush and havdala are recited for Shabbat, they are also recited for holidays, "for they are all 'Sabbaths of God.'" This comparison between Yom Tov and Shabbat in the words of the Rambam emerges from the words of the gemara in Chagiga (18a).

Rashi notes that an ordinary mitzva cannot serve as a sign that we are keeping God's Torah. This is because the sign does not lie in the servant's obedience to his Master's Torah, which is found in all mitzvot, but only in particular mitzvot that the Torah defines as a sign, like tefillin or Shabbat. According to him, it may be that certain mitzvot represent a special connection between the people of Israel and God, like tefillin, which express the idea of the name of God being called upon us, or like Shabbat, which expresses the covenant created between God and His people through its observance.

Yet, the question remains: Why should we restrict the donning of tefillin on Shabbat and Yom Tov, just because they are a sign? Is this because wearing tefillin on those days would belittle the sign of Shabbat and Yom Tov? Or is it that the Torah declares that one can observe only 1 sign at a time? In other words, since the Torah explicitly excluded certain days ("from day to day," but not all days), we are forced to interpret that the Torah excluded those days which constitute a sign on their own. If so, the Torah is interested in exclusive signs, meaning that on a day which is itself a sign there is no room for another sign.

The Tosafot in Eiruvim (96a) seem to adopt the second possibility. According to them, the exposition, "from day to day," is based on "And it shall be for a sign." The Rashba (ibid.) take this same approach in the name of the Yerushalmi.

The Beit Yosef, citing Midrash Ne'elam on Shir Ha-Shirim 1:4, writes that in His great love for His people, God gave them the mitzva of tefillin, a seal that is like the image of the king. God promised us in His Torah that as long as that image is seen upon us, the nations of the world will fear us, as per the verse cited above (Devarim 28:10). Later, owing to the supernal love that the King had for us, He gave us His seal itself, as it were. In other words, God gave us Shabbat and Yom Tov, which themselves are the tefillin of the head worn by God. On these days, since we hold the supernal seal of the King, we must set aside the earthly tefillin that we put on every day. There is a grave prohibition to set aside the tefillin of the Master of the Universe and don our earthly tefillin, as they are only a token of the image of the King.

The Zohar there goes on about the matter of Chol Ha-Mo'ed, which draws its illumination from Yom Tov, and so Chol Ha-Mo'ed is also considered like the tefillin of the hand of the Master of the Universe that rest on the arms of Israel. Therefore, even on Chol Ha-Mo'ed, one should not wear human tefillin, because we are crowned with the seal of the King Himself.

In this way, expression is given to the power of tefillin, both human tefillin and God's tefillin, which are but an expression of the mighty connection between God and the people of Israel. We wear the seal of the King, and we avouch each other – we avouch God and God avouches us.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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