

## Heart, Head, and Hand Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

א"ח

### Parshat Va'et'hanan

**You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as ornaments between your eyes.** (Deuteronomy 6:8)

This is the Commandment of *t'fillin* (phylacteries), the leather boxes in which we place certain verses of the Torah and which we bind upon our left arm (right arm, if one is left-handed) and place gently upon our foreheads. Because the verse first refers to the hand and only then to the forehead, we place the *t'fillin* first on the arm and only then on the head. When we remove them, after prayers, we reverse the order and take the *t'fillin* first from the head and only then from the arm.

Well, it's only logical that we take the *t'fillin* off in the reverse sequence from that by which we put them on, but there is another reason as well. The text speaks of the *t'fillin* of the head by saying **they shall be as ornaments** (note the plural form) **between your eyes**. Because they are to be ornaments (plural), the late Lubavitcher Rebbe Menahem Mendel Schneerson teaches (*Likkutei Sichot* XIX, 47-54), there must always be two (that is, the arm *t'fillin* as well as the head) whenever the head *t'fillin* is worn.

Well, okay, but how many of us are really interested in the technical details of the mitzvah of *t'fillin*? But there is another implication, one which may not be apparent at first glance. "The entire Torah," the Rebbe teaches, "may be likened to *t'fillin*." And thus, just as the *t'fillin* combine the hand and the head, so, too, the service of Torah and mitzvot includes aspects of both the hand and head *t'fillin*.

The *t'fillin* of the head is relatively easy to understand. It is the mind, the brain, the "head stuff" of the Torah. We study Torah; we learn; we explore and examine and analyze. But, if we are to liken Torah to *t'fillin*, we must remember that the head *t'fillin* can only be worn in conjunction with the arm *t'fillin*, and so we must explore the significance of the arm.

The arm *t'fillin* is worn on the biceps, opposite the heart, and it is thus a symbol of the service of the heart, of our awe and love for G\*d, just as the head *t'fillin*, placed adjacent to the brain, symbolizes the service of the mind.

Likening the *t'fillin* to Torah provides us with four lessons.

First, we put on the arm (that is, the heart) *t'fillin* first. Our emotional G\*d-connection takes priority. Only after we have connected with G\*d on an emotional level will we be able to link up intellectually.

Second, just as the head *t'fillin* cannot stand alone but must always be accompanied by the arm (heart) *t'fillin*, so the head, the intellect, cannot provide us with a full understanding and appreciation of our G\*d-connection. The intellect can stand only when it is supported by the emotions.

Third, although we put on the arm-*t'fillin* before the head-*t'fillin*, we wrap it and tighten it around our arm and hand only after we have donned the *t'fillin* of the head. Thus, the head, the intellect, is not merely preceded by the heart; it is surrounded by the heart. Our scholarly exploration of the Divine must be embedded within our emotional and spiritual connection.

Finally, the wrapping of the arm-*t'fillin* brings the strap from the biceps, opposite the heart, to the hand, the symbol of action. The donning of the *t'fillin*, thus, becomes a three-step dance. We first move to the heart, the feelings. It is here that we have our most immediate connection with G\*d, in the World of *Briyah*, Creation, Passion. Having established our emotional G\*d-connection, we can then explore the meaning, the “head stuff,” in our minds. Knowledge is more finite than feeling. Our capacity for knowledge may be limited (although almost certainly not so limited as we imagine it to be). Our capacity to love is unlimited (even if we often try to limit it), and that which is more limited stands farther from the Divine than does that which is less limited. This is the World of *Yetzirah*, Formation, Understanding. Finally, we move on down to the hand, the physical manifestation of both the emotions and the understanding. Here we are wholly in the physical (not that there is a real dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual/emotional/intellectual, but merely that they work in different ways). The physical is even more limited than is the intellectual, for we can imagine far more than we can do. As Robert Browning said, “A man’s reach must exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?” And this is the World of *Assiyah*, Action, Doing, whose meaning and significance are dependent upon the intellectual and, before that, the emotional.

The removal of the *t'fillin* is in the opposite order, as, step by step, we symbolically transcend our hands, our minds, and our hearts, to reach the World of *Atzilut*, the World of Emanation, the total transcendence of all limitation.

To that transcendence may we soon be led.

Shabbat Shalom.