



**Bar / Bat Mitzvah**



Source Materials  
Rabbi Efrem Goldberg  
[reg@brsonline.org](mailto:reg@brsonline.org)

① ETHICS OF OUR  
FATHERS [5:25]

[כה] הוא הִזָּה אומר: בֶּן חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים לְמִקְרָא, בֶּן עֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים לְמִשְׁנָה, בֶּן שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לְמִצְוֹת, בֶּן חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לְגִמְרָא, בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה לְחִפָּה, בֶּן עֶשְׂרִים לְרֵדוּף, בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים לְכָח, בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים לְבִינָה, בֶּן חֲמִשִּׁים לְעֶצֶה, בֶּן שְׁשִׁים לְזִקְנָה, בֶּן שִׁבְעִים לְשִׁיבָה, בֶּן שְׁמוֹנִים לְגְבוּרָה, בֶּן תְּשַׁעִים לְשׁוּת, בֶּן מֵאָה כְּאִלוֹ מֵת וְעָבַר וְכִטַּל מִן הָעוֹלָם.

[25] He used to say: A five-year-old begins Scripture; a ten-year-old begins Mishnah; a thirteen-year-old becomes obliged to observe the commandments; a fifteen-year-old begins the study of Gemara; an eighteen-year-old goes to the marriage canopy; a twenty-year-old begins pursuit [of a livelihood]; a thirty-year-old attains full strength; a forty-year-old attains understanding; a fifty-year-old can offer counsel; a sixty year-old attains seniority; a seventy-year-old attains a ripe old age; an eighty-year-old shows strength; a ninety-year-old becomes stooped over; a hundred-year-old is as if he were dead, passed away and ceased from the world.

② TALMUD [YOMA 82a]

בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֶה וּבֶן תְּשַׁע מְחַנְכִּין אוֹתוֹ – Rav Huna said: אָמַר רַב הוּנָא בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֶה וּבֶן תְּשַׁע מְחַנְכִּין אוֹתוֹ – An eight-year-old or a nine-year-old<sup>[6]</sup> is trained to fast for a few hours; בֶּן עֶשְׂרִי וּבֶן אַחַת עֶשְׂרֵה מְשַׁלְּמִין מִדְּרַבָּנָן – a ten-year-old or an eleven-year-old<sup>[7]</sup> completes the fast under Rabbinic law; בֶּן שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה מְשַׁלְּמִין מִדְּאוּרֵייתָא – a twelve-year-old completes the fast under Biblical law;<sup>[8]</sup> וְרַב נַחֲמָן – all this applies in the case of a girl.<sup>[9]</sup> אָמַר – And Rav Nachman says: בֶּן תְּשַׁע וּבֶן עֶשְׂרִי מְחַנְכִּין – A nine-year-old or a ten-year-old is trained to fast for a few hours; בֶּן אַחַת עֶשְׂרֵה וּבֶן שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה – an eleven-year-old or a twelve-year-old completes the fast under Rabbinic law; בֶּן שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה – a thirteen-year-old completes the fast under Biblical law; מְשַׁלְּמִין מִדְּאוּרֵייתָא – this applies in the case of boys.<sup>[10]</sup>

③ GENESIS [34:25]

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְּהִיוֹתָם  
בְּאֲבִים וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי-בְנֵי-יַעֲקֹב שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחֵי דִינָה  
כִּי אִישׁ חָרְבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל-הָעִיר בֵּטַח וַיַּהַרְגוּ כָּל-זָכָר וְאֶת-  
חָמוֹר וְאֶת-שָׂכֶם בְּנוֹ הָרָגוּ לְפִי-חָרֵב וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-דִּינָה  
כִּי מִבֵּית שָׂכֶם וַיֵּצְאוּ:

<sup>25</sup> And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and they came upon the city confidently, and killed every male. <sup>26</sup> And Hamor and Shechem his son they killed at the point of sword. Then they took Dinah from Shechem's house and left.

④ NUMBERS [5:6]

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ  
אוֹ-אִשָּׁה כִּי יַעֲשׂוּ מִכָּל-חַטָּאת הָאֵלֶּם לְמַעַל מֵעַל  
בַּיהוָה וְאִשְׁמָה הִגִּפֹּשׁ הֵהוּא: וְהִתְוַדּוּ אֶת-חַטָּאתָם אֲשֶׁר  
עָשׂוּ וְהָשִׁיב אֶת-אֲשָׁמוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וְחִמִּישְׁתּוֹ יִסֹּף עָלָיו וְנָתַן  
כֹּהֵן לְאִשֶּׁר אָשָׁם לוֹ: וְאִם-אֵין לְאִישׁ גֹּאֵל לְהָשִׁיב הָאֲשָׁם  
אֵלָיו הָאֲשָׁם הַמוֹשֵׁב לַיהוָה לַכֹּהֵן מִלְּבָד אֵיל הַכִּפּוּרִים  
אֲשֶׁר יִכְפְּרֶבּוּ עָלָיו: וְכָל-תְּרוּמָה לְכָל-קֹדֶשׁי בְּנֵי-  
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרִיבוּ לַכֹּהֵן לוֹ יִהְיֶה: וְאִישׁ אֶת-קֹדֶשׁוֹ  
לוֹ יִהְיֶה אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִתֵּן לַכֹּהֵן לוֹ יִהְיֶה:

<sup>5</sup> HASHEM spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>6</sup> "Speak to the Children of Israel: A (man or woman) who commits any of man's sins, by committing treachery toward HASHEM, and that person shall become guilty — <sup>7</sup> they shall confess their sin that they committed; he shall make restitution for his guilt in its principal amount and add its fifth to it, and give it to the one to whom he is indebted. <sup>8</sup> If the man has no kinsman to whom the debt can be returned, the returned debt is for HASHEM, for the Kohen, aside from the ram of atonement with which he shall provide him atonement. <sup>9</sup> And every portion from any of the holies that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohen shall be his. <sup>10</sup> A man's holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohen shall be his."

## ⑤ TALMUD [SANHEDRIN 69a]

דְּבִי חֻקְיָהּ תִּנָּה – A Baraisa was taught in the academy of Chizkiyah: „וְכִי-יִזַּד אִישׁ” – Scripture states: *IF A MAN WILL ACT INTENTIONALLY [yazid] against his fellow to kill him,*<sup>(9)</sup> when it could have stated: “If a man will act wickedly.” Since Scripture chose the word *yazid*, we may derive that אִישׁ מְזִיד וּמְזִיעַ – A MAN’S body “COOKS” [*meizid*] sperm (i.e. it causes the sperm to mature) AND then IMPREGNATES with it,<sup>(10)</sup> וְאִין קָטָן מְזִיד וּמְזִיעַ – BUT A MINOR’S body DOES NOT COOK [*meizid*] the sperm AND then IMPREGNATE with it; rather, it ejaculates immature sperm. For this reason, a minor is incapable of fathering a child.

## ⑥ TALMUD [NIDDAH 56a]

Our Rabbis taught: These<sup>7</sup> are the rulings of Rabbi. R. Simeon b. Eleazar stated, The age limits that were assigned to the girl apply to the boy while those assigned to the boy apply to the girl.<sup>8</sup> R. Hisda stated: What is Rabbi’s reason? Because it is written in Scripture, *And the Lord God built<sup>9</sup> the rib<sup>10</sup> which teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, endowed the woman with more understanding<sup>11</sup> than the man.* And the other?<sup>12</sup> – He requires that text<sup>9</sup> for the same deduction as the one made by Resh Lakish, for Resh Lakish citing R. Simeon b. Menasya stated, *And the Lord God built the rib which he took from the man into a woman, and he brought her unto the man,*<sup>1</sup> teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, plaited Eve’s hair and then brought her to Adam, for in the sea-towns they describe net-work as *binyatha*.<sup>2</sup> But what is R. Simeon b. Eleazar’s reason? – R. Samuel son of R. Isaac replied: As a boy frequents the house of his teacher his subtlety<sup>3</sup> develops earlier.<sup>4</sup>

## ⑦ THE MINHAGIM

While the concept of *bar mitzvah* itself is already mentioned in the Talmud, the custom of celebrating it with any kind of festivity is relatively recent. The earliest reference to any celebration is by a fifteenth century authority who declares that it is as incumbent upon the father to make a festive meal on the day his son becomes *bar mitzvah* as it is on the day of his wedding.<sup>1</sup>

## ⑧ IBID

The contemporary custom of celebrating the *bar mitzvah* with lavish and ostentatious parties has no basis in Jewish tradition and it is in fact contrary to the spirit if not the letter of Jewish law and morality.

## 9 THE MINHAGIM

After the boy is called up to the Torah and recites the appropriate benedictions, the father pronounces a peculiar blessing: *Barukh she-petarani me-onsho shel zeh*—"Blessed is He Who has now freed me from the liability of this one." This is based on the Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 63, 10): Rabbi Eleazar said: A father is obligated to occupy himself with the upbringing of his son till he becomes thirteen; thereafter he should say "Blessed is He Who has freed me from the liability of this one." The underlying meaning is that the father is responsible for the misdeeds of his minor son since they are the result of a lack of proper upbringing by the father. On this day, as the son reaches manhood, the father is relieved of further responsibility for him.<sup>2</sup>

## 10 TEFILLIN

1. *Kadesh* (Exodus 13:1-10), containing our obligation to remember the Exodus.
2. *VeHayah Ki YeViaCha* (*Ibid* 13:11-16), speaking of our obligation to transmit this tradition to our children.
3. The *Sh'ma* (Deut. 6:4-9), speaking of G-d's unity and our mutual bond of love.
4. *VeHaya Im Sh'moa* (*Ibid.* 11:13-21), declaring man's responsibility toward G-d.

⑪ TALMUD [BERACHOS 6a]

☞ G-d's Tefillin

Rabbi Avin bar Rav Ada said in the name of Rabbi Yitzchok, "Where do we find that G-d wears Tefillin?"

It is written (Isa. 62:8), "G-d has sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength."

"His right hand" is the Torah, as it is written (Deut. 33:2), 'from His right hand came a fiery law for them.'

"The arm of His strength" is Tefillin, as it is written (Psalm 29:11), "G-d gives strength to His people."

But where do we find that the Tefillin are Israel's strength?

It is written (Deut. 28:10), "And the people of the earth shall see that G-d's Name is called upon you, and they shall (see your strength) and be awed by you."

We learned that the great Rabbi Eliezer said, "This is speaking of the Tefillin on the head."

Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchok asked Rabbi Chiyah bar Avin, "And what is written in the Tefillin of the Master of the world?"

He replied that it contains the verse (I Chr. 17:21), "Who is like Your people Israel, a nation one on earth, whom G-d went to redeem for Himself for a people, to make Himself a name, by great and tremendous things."

(Talmud Berachos 6a)

⑫ TALMUD [IBID 7a]

It is written that G-d told Moses (Ex. 33:23), "I will take away My hand, and you will see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

Rabbi Chana bar Bizna said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Chasida, "We learn that G-d showed Moses the knot of His head Tefillin."

(Ibid. 7a)

⑬ ZOHAR

We find a hint in Elijah's introduction in the Tikuney Zohar,<sup>[8]</sup> where he says:

Love is the right hand,  
Power is the left,  
Glory is the body,  
Victory and Splendor are the two feet . . .  
Wisdom is the brain,  
Understanding is the heart . . .  
And the Crown of all  
is the Place where Tefillin rest . . .

Some of our most important rituals belong exclusively to the home, such as the *Seder*, the *Succah*, the Sabbath table, and the Chanukah lamp. The continuity of Judaism rests on the home more than anything else. As our sages teach us, "If there are no lambs, there can be no rams."<sup>[41]</sup>

This *Bayis* — the home is a woman's Tefillin. It is her contribution to the overall picture of G-d's purpose.

It is interesting to note that G-d told Moses "This is what you must say to the family of Jacob and teach the sons of Israel." (Exodus 19:3)<sup>[42]</sup> If the Torah does not enter the Jewish home first, there can be no continuity of Judaism.

This spirit of Torah in the Jewish home (*Bayis*) is the same as the parchments of Torah in the Tefillin box (*Bayis*). But this is the domain of the woman.

---

## Tefillin In The Classics

---

### ❖ In The Talmud

Tefillin are Israel's strength. It is written (Deut. 28:10), "And the peoples of the earth shall see that G-d's Name is called upon you, and they shall be awed by you."

*Berachos 6a*



A man who washes his hands, puts on Tefillin, says the *Sh'ma* and prays is considered to have built an alter and offered sacrifice. He is also said to have truly accepted upon himself the yoke of heaven.

*Ibid. 14b, 15a*



Rabbi Jeremiah saw that Rabbi Zera was very jubilant. He asked, "Is it not written (Prov. 14:23), 'In seriousness there is profit?' " Rabbi Zera answered, "I rejoice for I have worn Tefillin today."

*Ibid. 30b*



Every single Jew is surrounded by seven *Mitzvos*. He has Tefillin on his arm and head, a *Mezuzah* on his door, and four *Tzitzis* on his garment. Thus, King David said (Psalm 119:164), "I will praise You each day with seven."

*Tosefta, Berachos 6:31*

The *Dalet* in the knot represents G-d's justice in all His actions.

The *Yud* represents the final stage, where this justice is expressed in deed.

The seven windings on the arm represent the seven emanations, paralleling the seven days of creation. It is through these seven stages that all things proceed from G-d.

The seven rings coiled in a descending spiral represent G-d's ways in guiding His world. They end in three rings around the middle finger, representing the threefold betrothal between G-d and Israel, as discussed in the first section. This betrothal is the goal of the entire process of history. The ultimate betrothal will take place in the Messianic Era and in the World to Come.

---

## For Girls Only

---

I understand that there may be some girls reading this. They are most probably saying, "All this is very fine. Tefillin are a most wonderful way to bind yourself to G-d. But it is only for boys. Where do we come in?"

On a most simple level, the reason for the commandments is to establish a link with G-d. The most profound way to do this is to resemble Him.

There is one unique way that women resemble G-d in a way that no man could ever hope to. Only a woman can create within her body. Only a woman can bear a child. In this sense, a woman partakes of G-d's attributes more intimately than any man.

The Kabbalists teach us that the hand Tefillin represent the feminine element. The single hollow can be said to represent the womb, and the coils, the umbilical cord.

What man partakes of with an object, woman partakes of with her very body.

The box of Tefillin is called a *Bayis* — literally a house. The woman also has her *Bayis* — the home in which she raises a family. One could say that a woman's home is her Tefillin.

Women resemble G-d through their Tefillin, just as man does through his. The entire world is G-d's house, and the attribute that tends to it is called the *Shechinah* or Divine Presence. It is interesting to note that the word *Shechinah* is of the feminine gender. The Kabbalists call it the *Akeres HaBayis* — literally, the Mistress of the house.

There are two basic elements in Judaism, the home and the synagogue. Unlike other religions where the church is primary, Judaism treats the home and synagogue as being co-equal.



The man who never wears Tefillin does not have his needs of redemption.

The Talmud calls him a sinner with his body — the hair binding the material to the spiritual has been broken.

We are taught that the man who does not wear Tefillin cannot escape *Gehenom* unharmed. The Talmud says that "his soul is burned and the ashes scattered under the feet of the righteous," as alluded to in the verse (Malachi 3:21), "And you shall tread upon the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet." They might leave *Gehenom*, but they remain so filled with unredeemed evil that they cannot fully return to the Holy.<sup>[30]</sup> They do not have this one hair of the Tefillin, and cannot redeem their evil.

This hair therefore remains a lifeline, keeping one in contact with the Holy at all times.

Even if a man sins, as long as he maintains the link of the Tefillin, he can still bring himself back to G-d.

As long as you maintain this hairsbreadth of Godliness, you can always return. . .

## The Mystery of Tefillin

Now that we have explored some general aspects of Tefillin in depth, we can look at some of its details.<sup>[31]</sup> As we have already mentioned, every single detail is intimately linked with the very mystery of creation and existence.

In this section, we will present some very deep concepts. But it is important to remember that all this is less than a drop in the ocean of Truth.

The number four is very closely linked with Tefillin. There are four parchments inside four boxes. The shape of Tefillin is a four-sided square. The head Tefillin knot is in the shape of a Dalet, the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There is an unusual four-headed *Shin* on the head Tefillin.

The number four represents the four stages through which all creation is brought into existence. These are represented by the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, G-d's Name *Yud Kay Vav Kay*. They are: emanation, creation, formation, and completion, alluded to in the verse (Isa. 43:7), "All that is called by My Name, for My glory (1), I have created it (2), I have formed it (3), and I have completed it.(4)"<sup>[32]</sup>

We will also come across the number seven, as in the seven windings around the arm. These represent the seven *Midos*, the emanations through which G-d guides the world. They are the seven steps linking G-d to His creation and represented in the seven days of creation. The seven emanations are also represented by the seven branches of the *Menorah*. They are alluded to in the passage (1 Chr. 29:11), "Yours, O G-d, are the greatness (1), the power (2), and the glory (3), the victory (4) and the splendor (5), for all that is in heaven and earth (6); Yours, O G-d, is the Kingdom (7)."<sup>[33]</sup>

"TEFILLIN"  
R. ARYEH KAPLAN

Everything in the Tefillin is made from an animal product. Man is only perfected through his animal nature, that is, through his physical body. Man's main link with G-d is through the physical observance of His commandments.

Everything in Tefillin must be made only from kosher animal products. The physical can be raised to the Godly only when it is not intermingled with evil.

Tefillin begin with four parchments. These must be perfectly white. This alludes to the Infinite Light at the beginning of creation.

For any creation to exist, this Light had to be modulated and constricted. This is represented by the jet black letters written on the white parchment — "black fire on white fire."<sup>[34]</sup>

The fact that the letters are intelligent symbols teaches us that this modulation and constriction was through the supernal Intelligence.

The parchments are bound with the hair of a calf. This represents the power of evil, as discussed in the previous section. The very purpose of creation is bound by the necessity of evil in order to give man free will.

Ultimately, G-d's ways are hidden from man. We can sometimes see what G-d does, but only dimly perceive His purpose. The parchments are therefore hidden in a black box.

Scientists sometimes have to deal with a process that they cannot understand. They can, however, measure what goes into this process and what comes out. In such a case, they call this process a "black box." Tefillin are literally such a "black box."

The Tefillin must be square. Our sages teach us that the square is the archetype of that which is man made rather than natural.<sup>[35]</sup> The ultimate goal depends on man.<sup>[36]</sup>

The Tefillin boxes must be sewn with the veins of a kosher animal. Our sages teach us that there are 365 main veins in the body, corresponding to the 365 days of the year.<sup>[37]</sup> The boxes are sewn with twelve stitches, representing the twelve months of the year.<sup>[38]</sup> A most essential ingredient of creation is time, which makes our world an arena of activity. Only in such a world can G-d's purpose be fulfilled.

The head Tefillin are inscribed with the letter *Shin*. On

the right side, it is the usual three-headed *Shin*, while on the left, it contains four heads.

This *Shin* is the first letter of G-d's Name, *Sh-dai*, which is spelled out by the letters of the Tefillin. This Name is associated with channel of G-d's providence (*Yesod*). The *Shin* on the head Tefillin indicates that G-d's purpose governs all providence.

The two letters *Shin* on the head Tefillin have three and four heads respectively. This gives us a total of seven, representing the seven Midos, or emanations. They appear in letters, intelligent symbols, indicating that we are dealing with the intelligent reason and purpose behind all providence.

In the letter *Shin*, all the heads are connected to a single base. This shows that all forces are ultimately directed toward one goal.<sup>[39]</sup>

The two straps emanating from the head Tefillin to the right and left represent the two basic forces of creation, love and judgment. While sometimes G-d's love would dictate mercy, His judgment demands retribution. Ultimately, G-d's justice is a combination of the two. This is represented by the knot, binding the two sides together.

The straps are then allowed to dangle to the lower parts of the body. G-d's justice extends to even the lowest levels of creation.

The hand Tefillin are worn on the left arm. The right hand is love and the left is judgment. G-d's love is given freely, but His judgment is dictated by His purpose.

The head Tefillin have four compartments, while the hand Tefillin consist of just one. All four levels of existence are directed toward a single goal.

The hand Tefillin are bound with a knot in the shape of the letter Yud. This letter always symbolizes the ultimate good in the World to Come.<sup>[40]</sup> G-d's action is guided by His ultimate goal which is this Future World.

The Yud is also the final letter of the Name *Sh-dai*, the Name associated with G-d's providence. Together with the *Shin* of the head Tefillin, and the *Dalet* of its knot, the Tefillin spell out this Name.