

Donning the Protecting Armor of our Lord

Twice at the end of this week's Parashah we are told to mark the lesson that the LORD strong-handedly took us out of Egypt as a "sign upon your hand and as a reminder [or frontlet] between your eyes." Although it's not clear from the verses what type of figurative or literal marking or commemoration is intended, Jewish tradition has understood these two sections, along with the two we recite in the Shema from Deuteronomy, as the sources for the precept to don tefillin, known in Greek-derived English as phylacteries, upon the arm and head. Here in Exodus, this precept to mark the high-handed Divine Redemption as "signs" is expounded in the context of two clear commandments which more concretely follow from the story and link to its themes. Firstly, the general context here is the commandment to separate the First-Born of Israelite man and domesticated beast, dedicating the first-born of the flock and herd for sacrifice (and paying in substitution for the first-born of man and donkey). Since it was the final Plague, the Smiting of the First Born of Egypt, which at last secured the release of Israel from Egyptian bondage, it follows logically that all Israelite firstborn of that and following generations should be declared forfeited in consecration to God in return for having been spared. Secondly, the command to observe a yearly Paschal sacrifice in the spring, accompanied by a seven-day spring Festival during which matzah is eaten and leaven prohibited also clearly perpetuates the memory of the Redemption as re-enactment and reliving of the conditions of the original Passover.

But why should God's High-Handed Redemption in taking us out of Egypt be commemorated "as a sign upon your hand and for frontlets between your eyes?" How does this symbolism commemorate God's "Strong Hand"? Of course, anything affixed to the hand of Man can serve as a symbol of the Hand of God. The very term "hand" or "arm" itself is symbolic of power, since Man most manifests his active power through the use of his hand/arm (and since Man is made in the Image of God we metaphorically use the term "hand" to speak of the Power of God, as well). But what kind of "frontlet between the eyes" would serve as a reminder of the Power of God's Hand? And what type of "sign" would a man place upon his arm? We now place mini-paragraphs containing these paragraphs in the tefillin boxes on our arms and heads. But in order for such a metaphor to make sense, I would think that it must have referenced a prior practice.

As regards the "between the eyes" piece, our tradition has always had it worn entirely above the forehead. In elevating this "frontlet" so far up, indeed, above the hairline, our tradition is interpreting the "frontlet" as a true crown. Of course, a crown is the symbol of ruling power and authority par excellence. Although it can also be thought of as arrogating some of God's power, authority, and nobility to ourselves, in wearing these noble ornaments, we simultaneously testify that only God is the true Power and King above us.

I've always theorized that both arm and head tefillin ultimately derive from early armor. Greek boxers fought not with gloves but with leather straps around the knuckles much like our tefillin straps are wrapped today. An early type of "greave" or arm protection was to wrap similar thongs around the arms, which didn't completely protect all of the skin but was enough to keep a sword from penetrating easily. And crowns, in turn, derive from helmets and head-gear, at least enough to deflect a blow from above. Lightweight but tough armor was originally made from leather, before metal was used. To possess a set of such armor meant that one was a knight, vassal of a Liege-Lord but otherwise free, enjoying the protection of one's Lord and even partaking of His Authority, to some degree. We even wear three rings wrapped around our finger binding us to our Liege-Lord and simultaneously authorizing us as His Agents. The function of armor is, of course, to guard, a verb which is used many times in this section. Of course, the Greek term phylacterion means protective symbol or amulet, and one can understand that wearing "spiritual armor" could be interpreted that way. Fancy armor and weaponry, as well as protective clothing (and all clothing was originally protective), eventually morphed into status symbols and jewelry, which were also symbols of power, like the king's crown, scepter, arm-bands, bracelets, and jewels. But above all, the tefillin serve us as a regular reminder that God's Strong Hand, the Only True Redemptive Power, which defeated Pharaoh, freeing us from Egypt, still guards and protects Israel, and that we, too, partake in and can arrogate some of that Power to ourselves.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Bo

January 7-8, 2022 | Shebat 5-6, 5782

SCHEDULE

*While our choir takes a break,
together let's fill the sanctuary with music and prayer*

Candle Lighting | 4:27 pm

Friday Evening Services | 4:30 pm

Zemirot | 8:30 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Levy | Led by teen leaders and Mrs. Lisa Rohde

Outdoor Kiddush | following services

NO Shabbat Afternoon Class this week.

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 4:25 pm

Habdala | 5:12 pm

Virtual Habdala | 5:30 pm | Rev. Z. Edinger

Parent-Child Learning - with S'mores | 6:15 pm | *This session led by Rafe Sasson*

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Thursday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): **4:30 pm**

*Reminder: **WELL-FITTED MASKS REQUIRED INDOORS. KN95 PREFERRED.**
If you choose not to wear a mask outdoors when permitted, you represent & warrant that you're
fully vaccinated.*

Please send UPDATED vaccination card(s) to info@shearithisrael.org.
**Many upcoming activities will require proof of UP-TO-DATE vaccination &
boosters.**

THIS SHABBAT



Let's Fill the Sanctuary with OUR Voices!

While our choir takes a break,
together let's fill the sanctuary with music and prayer.

Parent-Child Learning - with S'mores!

THIS Saturday Night, January 8 | 6:15 pm

This session will be led by Rafe Sasson

For elementary school children and their parents or grandparents

To register, visit shearithisrael.org/csiyouth5782.

The Sisterhood Presents:

The History of Jewish Comedy

THIS Saturday night, January 8 | 8:00 PM | on Zoom

with comedian Geoff Kole

who will present the "long and short history of Jewish comedy"

followed by Q & A

Advance registration is required. Fee: \$5:00.

Registrants will receive the zoom link.

To register, visit shearithisrael.org/sisterhood-comedy.

KIDDUSH

Sponsor a Hot Outdoor Kiddush!

Sponsoring a kiddush is a wonderful way to commemorate a special occasion or honor a loved one. We could use a couple of sponsors each week to help maintain the warmth of our community!

To sponsor, visit shearithisrael.org/outdoor-kiddush.

DON'T DELAY - PRE-PAY!

Membership Pre-Payment Offer

DEADLINE: January 15

Members, remember that you can pre-pay your July 2022-June 2023 dues now at this membership year's rates. Refer to our emails for instructions.

COMING UP

ONLY 2 SPOTS LEFT!

Youth Trip to the Tenement Museum: *At Home in 1911*
Sunday, January 16 | 10:30 am | Meets at the Museum: 97 Orchard Street
Full vaccination required - bring proof!

Our youth are invited on a special tour of the recreated 1910s apartment of an Eastern European Jewish family earning a living in the garment trade. Step into their home and experience what daily life was like for an immigrant family in 1911 – balancing work, family, community, and an evolving cultural identity.

To register, visit shearithisrael.org/csiyouth5782.

"The Most Fruitful Prayer In The Liturgy"

A Tu B'Shebat Lecture and Sample Dishes with Rabbi Ira Rohde

Sunday, January 16 | 7:30 pm | refer to our emails for the Zoom link

In honor of Tu B'Shebat, join Rabbi Ira Rohde as he examines "The Most Fruitful Prayer in Our Liturgy," the "El Na Otzarekha HaTob Petah MiZebulah"

by Joseph ibn Abitur.

By keeping the memory of the traditional agriculture and crops of the Holy Land alive, we will see how this poem nurtured and preserved a love for the Land. Rabbi

Rohde will present recipes and sample dishes made from some of the more unfamiliar of the fruits mentioned.

WE'RE HIRING YOUTH LEADERS!

Want to help make Shabbat and Holiday mornings special for kids aged 5 -12, or know someone who does?

We're hiring youth leaders!

College students and beyond welcome to apply.

Check out our emails or our Facebook page to view the job description and apply now - or share this opportunity with your friends.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

If you are aged 65+ or immunocompromised, **NYC will send a trained clinician to your home to do a free PCR test.** Available 7 days/week, 9am-7pm.

Call 929-298-9400 to schedule an appointment.