

# DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SHEL-YAD AND SHEL-ROSH

BO

BESHALACH

VA'ESCHANAN

EIKEV

TEFILLIN / TZITZIS / LEARNING TORAH / KNOWING TORAH  
ACTION VS. RESULT / DOING A MITZVAH BEFORE ITS TIME  
CONTROLLING EMOTIONS / CONTROLLING THE MIND

לע"נ זאב ארי' ע"ה בן יבלחסי"א שניאור זלמן גליק

The Rambam begins Hilchos Tefillin by explaining the two mitzvos, “That the tefillin should be placed on the head, and a person should tie them on the arm.”

This is difficult, since the order in the passuk is first, "וקשרתם לאות על ידך," that the tefillin should be tied on the arm, and then "והיו לטטפות בין עיניך," that there should be tefillin on the head. Indeed the Alter Rebbe paskens in Shulchan Aruch<sup>1</sup>, that first we put on the shel yad, and then the shel rosh. The question arises, why does the Rambam write them in the opposite order, first the shel rosh and then the shel yad?

(There are those – for example the Chemdas Yisrael, in his kuntres Ner Mitzvah 12-13 – who try to answer that really the halachah should have been to put the shel rosh on first, as it is holier, and the general rule<sup>2</sup> is that "כל המקודש מחבירו קודם לחבירו" (whatever is holier comes first). However there is a גזירת הכתוב (a decree from the passuk, a halachah that we don't know the reason for) that the shel rosh is first. And this is what the Rambam is hinting to by mentioning the shel rosh first. The problem with this explanation is that it would make sense if the Rambam mentioned the shel rosh first and that was it. The Rambam, however, brings all the halachos – which are important for the actual wearing of tefillin – of shel rosh first, and doesn't just mention it first.)

Another question is why the Rambam counts each of the tefillin as their own mitzvah. The Ramban<sup>3</sup> asks, in the Rambam's own rules<sup>4</sup> on how he counts the 613 mitzvos, he writes that two mitzvos that are one concept are counted as

1. 25:12.

2. Zevachim 99a.

3. Hasagos Haramban al Sefer Hamitzvos, Rule 11.

4. Sefer Hamitzvos, Rule 11 at the end.

one. For example tzitzis, which have the mitzvah of seven white strings, and also one string of tcheiles, (and without one of them the other doesn't count,) is nevertheless one mitzvah. Why then are tefillin counted as two?

A third question on hilchos tefillin can be asked from Maseches Beitzah.<sup>5</sup> It is brought there, that if someone is traveling and night falls, (and he can therefore no longer wear tefillin,) he should cover the shel rosh with his hand (if he is too worried to take it off as it might fall). Why does the Gemara not say anything about removing, or at least covering, the shel yad?

**2** In order to answer all these questions, we must first explain the two types of mitzvos: **פעולה** and **נפעל**. There are those mitzvos that the main thing is the **פעולה**, the action, such as to learn Torah by day and night, that the actual learning is the main thing, and those that the main thing is the effect, the **נפעל**, such as the mitzvah of knowing the entire Torah, that the learning and reviewing is in order to know Torah.

The Rogatchover Gaon explains<sup>6</sup> that this is the difference between shel yad and shel rosh. The mitzvah of shel rosh is, as the Rambam writes, that the tefillin “should be on the head” and shel yad is “to tie them on your arm.”

There is an example of a mitzvah that has both, and that is the bris. As the Rogatchover Gaon writes<sup>7</sup>, the mitzvah is to be **מהול**, to be a

5. 15a.

6. *Tzofnas Paneach al Harambam, Hilchos Tefillin, 4:4.*

7. *Ibid, Hilchos Milah.*

person with a bris, and also to do the milah.

The practical effect of this is twofold: If someone is born with a bris, he still has to do a procedure called hatafas dam, to make up for the peulah of bris which is lacking. Additionally, someone who does something to reverse the bris is considered a **מפר ברית**, a person who went back on the bris, even though he had the peula of milah, because he is missing the nifal of being mahul.

We now have the answer to the Ramban's question, why they are two mitzvos, sine they are not one inyan, they are two completely different kinds of mitzvos!

**3** We see from the above that the mitzvah of tefillin shel yad is only when he wraps it, and shel rosh is every moment it's worn.

The practical effect of this is by the halachah<sup>8</sup> that if someone puts on tefillin before daylight, he needs to fix the tefillin at daybreak, otherwise he hasn't put on tefillin that day. This would only be by the shel yad, which the mitzvah is to tie, but not the shel rosh, which the mitzvah is only for it to be on the head.

This also answers the question we asked from Maseches Beitzah. Since the problem is only to do a mitzvah during the wrong time, therefore, tefillin shel rosh, that the mitzvah is to wear, needs to be removed (or covered). With the shel yad on the other hand, as long as they aren't tightened, he hasn't done a mitzvah in the wrong time.



*8. Menachos 36b.*

**4** Based on all this we can now answer the first question. The reason that the shel rosh is mentioned first by the Rambam is since the shel rosh is the main and more constant mitzvah, which is being fulfilled the entire day, as opposed to the shel yad, that its mitzvah is only at one point in the day, when he wraps them. (All the more so since Hilchos Tefillin is in Sefer Ahavah, which talks about, as the Rambam writes, “Mitzvos which we were commanded to do in order to love Hashem and remember Him constantly.”)

This can possibly be the very reason we put on shel yad first, as each of the tefillin add to the shleimus of the other, and the shel rosh is more important since it is a constant mitzvah.

**5** From this difference (binding the shel yad and placing the shel rosh) we can learn a lesson in avodas Hashem. The purpose of the shel rosh is to turn one’s מוחין, thoughts, towards serving Hashem, and the purpose of the shel yad is to set one’s מידות, emotions, towards serving Hashem.

The difference between mochin and middos is, middos are not under the control of a person to change them however he likes, and therefore the mitzvah of shel yad, which is connected to the middos, is to “tie” and control the middos. Mochin, on the other hand, are able to be directed towards kedushah, therefore the mitzvah of the shel rosh is that it should be מונח, placed, on the head, that the head should be מונח in kedushah.

## STUDY AID

1. Three questions, a. Why does the Rambam use the opposite order of the passuk? b. Why does he count the tefillin as two mitzvos? c. Why doesn't the Gemara say anything about covering the shel yad?
2. The two types of mitzvos, peulah and nifal. The example from talmud Torah, the difference between shel yad and shel rosh, and how this answers the second question.
3. The practical difference, and the answer to the third question.
4. The answer to the first question, and a reason to put on shel yad first.
5. The lesson in serving Hashem: middos need iskafya, and mochin, is'hapcha.

Source:

על פי ליקוטי שיחות חלק ל"ט פרשת ואתחנן שיחה ב'