

The Man Who Mistook His *Tefillin* for a Hat

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Tefillin, sometimes called “phylacteries,” are two little black boxes, inside of which are parchments inscribed with certain biblical passages. They are worn by Jews during morning prayers: one of the boxes is tied to the upper arm with a leather strap, and the other is connected to a leather headband, so that it sits on the hairline at the top of the forehead. *Tefillin* are worn inside, usually in the synagogue or, if one prays at home, then at home. While it is theoretically permitted to wear *tefillin* outside as well, in practice this is rarely done today, in part because of the various restrictions mentioned in connection with their use.¹

A hat, by contrast, is made to be worn outside, in the street. In Judaism, it is an altogether ordinary object. True, the Talmud instructs Jews to cover their heads when walking any distance greater than the minimal “four cubits” (six feet) as a sign of modesty and submission to God. But what *kind* of hat is a matter of indifference, indeed, any form of head-covering will do. Thus, these two objects, the “head” part of the *tefillin* and the hat, are each worn on the head, but they are in some sense opposites, the one sacred and the other ordinary, the first belonging to the world of the inside and the second to that of the outside.

For this reason, I will need to explain how it happened that Morris Kleinberg, an otherwise scrupulous observer of Jewish laws and customs, stepped out of his Manhattan apartment building one day wearing the “head” part of his *tefillin* instead of his customary fedora.

It had all started earlier that morning. Kleinberg, having overslept, failed to attend morning prayers at the synagogue, as was his custom. Now he had to pray hurriedly at home instead. Of course, his regular *tefillin* were kept next to his seat in the synagogue, but Kleinberg had been careful to acquire a second pair, which he kept at home in case of just such an emergency. He thus strode purposefully into his living room, opened the drawer in which this home pair of *tefillin* was stored...and then suddenly realized that half of the pair was missing. Some weeks earlier, he had noticed a white spot on the black lacquer of his arm-*tefillin* and had brought it to the synagogue to be retouched, since white spots are forbidden. There it remained; Kleinberg had simply forgotten to pick it up. Now, all he had available was the head part of his *tefillin* and the headband to which it was attached. Is it permitted for one to pray with the head part on one's head but without having the arm part strapped to one's arm? Kleinberg was not sure, but on reflection, he decided that it must be and so proceeded to place the head-*tefillin* on his head as usual, saying the appropriate blessing.

If only he had the other part bound tightly to his arm, he surely would not have failed to remove both it and the head-*tefillin* at the conclusion of his prayers. But somehow, sliding his suit jacket back over his shirtsleeve and encountering no encumbrance of the arm box, he forgot the head-*tefillin* entirely. Stranger still: the slight pressure exercised by the leather headband on his temples somehow convinced him that he was already wearing his everyday hat. Thus it was that he left his apartment that morning with the head part of his *tefillin* on his head instead of his hat.

“Good morning, Hector,” he said to the doorman as he stepped outside. Hector, an undiscerning sluggard, grunted his usual vague response and otherwise said, and indeed noticed, nothing. Kleinberg spotted a cab as soon as he reached the curb and hopped in, announcing the address of his company's building in a clear voice: “Broad Street, corner of Pine.” He was somewhat puzzled to see the cabdriver peer inquisitively into the rearview mirror once or twice.

He in turn glanced at the name printed on the driver's certificate: Tan Wing-mei. Kleinberg said nothing. Arrived at his destination, he proceeded on his way to the corner coffee shop to pick up his morning espresso. As he walked down the street with the little black box still strapped to his head, its leather straps dangling down next to his tie, Kleinberg felt one or two passers-by staring at him. A woman even raised her index finger as if to say something, but Kleinberg hurried by. What *is* with these people? Pilar, the girl behind the counter at the coffee shop, smiled broadly at him when he came in and hurried to bring him his espresso. She said not a word. Kleinberg also stopped at the corner kiosk, as was also his custom, to pick up that morning's *Wall Street Journal*. Everywhere people now seemed to be looking at him a bit strangely, but this did not particularly trouble him. He had long ago noticed that people sometimes do stare. New Yorkers are so used to everyone being enclosed in an halo of resolute indifference, one that is specifically designed to separate each from the other, that when someone (usually an out-of-towner, or sometimes a resident whose halo has mysteriously come loose)—when someone seems to be walking about without this protective film, all eyes are magically drawn to him. That must be it, thought Kleinberg, who had experienced such staring before; it must be one of those mornings. Thus it was that he entered his office building with the incongruous head box still strapped to his forehead. It was only when he reached the elevator that Jamal, the morning elevator boy, looked up and said, "Hey, Mr. K., what's that on your head?" Kleinberg instinctively lifted his hand to where his hat ought to have been and only then discovered to his horror that the head box that he thought he had returned to its place in the drawer had in fact been in plain sight since he had left his apartment. "Oh!" he exclaimed, and then again, "Oh! Oh!" He quickly removed the head box and stuffed it and its leather straps into the right pocket of his jacket. "What was that?" Jamal persisted. "Nothing, just a . . . nothing," Kleinberg answered. Thus ended a mildly embarrassing incident, whereby that which belongs to the inside was mistaken for that which belongs to the outside.

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But this is not quite all there is to say on the matter. I believe that, considered from a distance, Kleinberg's error that morning had a kind of symbolic quality to it. In fact, I like to think of him rounding the corner of Broad and Pine Streets with the head part of his *tefillin* firmly planted on his forehead and its straps a-flapping, his own expression mingling determination with a touch of bewilderment, just now passing that woman who raises her finger to question what she is seeing, as a kind of statue, or rather a *tableau vivant*, of Judaism itself. In particular, I believe he is at this moment a near-perfect embodiment of what is perhaps Judaism's most striking characteristic, what might be called its concern for the "sanctification of daily life." Before getting to that subject, however, I wish to start off with a more down-to-earth question, the one that Jamal asked a minute ago: "Hey, Mr. K., what's that on your head?" What is it indeed?

The thing that Kleinberg had on his head was a small leather cube, approximately one inch square, inside of which were four separated compartments. Each compartment contained a different piece of parchment inscribed with biblical verses: Exod. 13:1-10 in the first, Exod. 13:11-16 in the second, Deut. 6:4-9 in the third, and Deut. 11:13-21 in the fourth. Kleinberg, it must be admitted, had only the foggiest notion of his head-*tefillin*'s contents; it was enough to know that the little box, along with the box of the arm-*tefillin*, had to be worn for morning prayers. But the reason why these passages were the ones enclosed in that little black box, and the reason why this fairly odd-looking accoutrement should have found itself on his head in the first place, are not straightforward.

The Torah says, in the four passages just mentioned, that its words are to be bound "as a sign upon your hand, and as frontlets between your eyes." Actually, the "frontlets" part is something of a guess; no one knows for sure what the word *totafot* means in Hebrew.² In one of these four passages (Exod 13:9), the word "memorial" (*zikkaron*) appears instead of *totafot*, but this hardly clarifies things. But quite

apart from the precise meaning of the words, a real question arises from a reading of these four passages: what exactly are people being told to do?

About this there is a historic debate. Some Jews (notably some Karaites, who flourished in medieval and early modern times; apparently the Samaritans as well, and probably some Jews in more ancient days) maintained that this commandment does not involve actually tying anything to one's arm or head. Rather, exponents of this position argue, its aim is to instruct Jews to hold the Torah's words dear, binding them close, as it were, to one's head and heart. And the exponents do have a point. One of the four verses, Deut 11:18, says more specifically: "You shall put these words of Mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall tie them for a sign upon your arm, and they shall be as *totafot* between your eyes." The second part of the sentence seems to be a metaphorical reiteration of the first part: "Don't ever let these words of Mine be far from you! Tie them to yourself, keep them forever close!" Such a reading is supported by other verses in the Bible. Proverbs 6:20-21 says, "My son, keep your father's commandment and do not neglect your mother's teachings; *tie them upon your heart forever and bind them around your neck.*" This certainly does not seem to be a reference to *tefillin*; is it not simply the case that the parents' teachings are to be cherished and held close, and for that reason are compared to some sort of ornament worn close to the body? The lovesick maiden of the Song of Songs similarly says to her beloved, "Set me as a signet upon your hand, as a signet on your arm" (8:6), once again in the sense of, "Don't forget me, not for one minute!" Once again, an external ornament is invoked to signify metaphorical closeness. Another passage in Proverbs reads: "My son, do not forget my teaching, and may your heart keep my commandments... bind them around your neck, write them on the writing tablet of your heart" (3:1-3). Just as there does not seem to be any physical writing tablet on a person's heart, so the previous "bind them around your neck" ought likewise to be seen as figurative speech, a metaphor for keeping the parent's words constantly in mind. So, all in all, it might seem that the whole idea of binding the

tefillin to one's arm and head is a kind of literalization, turning an originally metaphorical commandment into a physical act.³

And yet, this commandment was not understood metaphorically—not in rabbinic Judaism and not in at least some Jewish groups in pre-rabbinic times, as may be evidenced in a number of sources.⁴ The reasons are no doubt complicated, dependent on both exegetical and other considerations.⁵ But what I wish to suggest here is that the decision in favor of actual, physical *tefillin* is altogether consistent with a particularly striking aspect of the “sanctification of daily life” mentioned earlier. Almost wherever possible, biblical commandments that might otherwise seem to be non-specific and/or addressed to one's internal state of mind are concretized into specific, *external* acts, so that, faced with a choice between “Keep these words in mind” and “Physically attach these words to your head and arm,” Judaism has—odd as it may seem—generally opted for the latter from ancient times on. Let me mention a few other examples of this same tendency:

Deuteronomy 30:20 urges Israelites to “love the Lord your God, to obey Him and *hold fast to Him*, for by this you will live and long endure upon the land that the Lord has sworn to give to your forefathers...” There is nothing particularly mysterious about the phrase “hold fast to Him.” It occurs elsewhere in the Bible in similar contexts: “serve Him and hold fast to Him” (Deut 10:20) “to walk in all His paths and to hold fast to Him” (Deut 11:22), “to keep His commandments and to hold fast to Him” (Josh 22:5). In all these, “holding fast” implies following closely all that God has ordained. But that is not how this phrase was interpreted in rabbinic texts:

And hold fast to Him: But is it indeed possible for a person to ascend on high and hold fast to *fire*—since it is said elsewhere “For the Lord your God is a consuming fire” [Deut 4:24] and “His throne is of tongues of flames” [Dan 7:9]? Rather [it means]: Hold fast to Torah sages and their students and I will account it for you as if you had ascended on high (*Sifrei Debarim* 49).

Here, the impossibility of “holding fast” to God physically has not led to the obvious metaphorical explanation of the phrase. Rather, this metaphorical embrace has been, as it were, brought down to earth and connected to something altogether concrete and close at hand, “Torah sages and their students.” This, in turn, was further concretized and specified in later sources:

To love the Lord your God and to hold fast to Him: But is it possible for someone to cling to the *Shekhinah* [God’s earthly presence]? Rather, anyone who marries his daughter to a scholar of Torah and conducts business with Torah scholars and causes Torah scholars to benefit from his possessions, Scripture accounts it as if he is clinging to the *Shekhinah* (b. *Ketubot* 111b).

So it is with other *mitzvot* as well. The commandment to “love the Lord your God and to serve Him with your whole heart” (Deut 11:13)—which, considered on its own, might seem to address a person’s whole attitude toward the Almighty—was taken as a reference to a specific act, namely prayer (b. *Ta’anit* 2a), and this understanding was then further codified by Maimonides as the requirement that each person pray to God at least once a day.⁶ This is another act of specifying and concretizing.

The same might well be said of the requirement to recite the *Shema* every morning and evening. The Torah says: “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and soul and strength. And you shall keep in mind these words that I am commanding you this day. Teach them to your children and speak about them as you sit about your house or walk along on a journey, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut 6:5-7). Moses speaks these words at the beginning of a long address, his final charge to the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy. In context, he might seem to be saying to his audience, “Keep the things that I am telling you today in mind and talk about them all the time, wherever you happen to be.” The phrases “as you sit about your house or walk along on a journey, when

you lie down and when you get up” are an instance of what classical rhetoricians referred to as *merismus*, a figure of speech “in which totality is expressed by contrasting parts.”⁷

Understood in this way, the words cited could scarcely be taken as an actual commandment; after all, who can keep in mind the entire contents of Deuteronomy every minute of the day, no matter where or when? But rather than therefore treating this paragraph as some sort of generalized exhortation, Judaism concretized it into the prescription of a specific *act*, to be repeated twice daily. That is, “these words that I am commanding you” were understood to be specifically the words of this very paragraph rather than the whole of Moses’ speech, and the *merismus* was explained as an explicit prescription of when those words were to be recited, at the time “when you lie down and when you get up” (m. *Berakhot* 1:1-2). If so, here is another act of turning the apparently general to something specific and concretizing it into a fixed act, in this case one to be repeated twice each day.

Such an understanding of Deut 6:5-7 is attested well before the rise of rabbinic Judaism. It is found in a number of pre-rabbinic sources,⁸ including, somewhat obliquely, these words from the Qumran *Community Rule* (10:10, 13-14):

With the entrance of the day and of night, I shall enter into the covenant of God,⁹ and with the going out of evening and of morning I shall speak of His laws...When I begin to stretch out my hands and feet, I will bless His name; when I begin to go out and in, to sit and get up, or upon lying down on my couch, I will extol Him; I will bless him with the offering of my lips....

It is noteworthy that this apparent reference to Deut 6:5-7 seems to represent a halfway position in the process of narrowing and concretization described above. While the *merismus* of “when you lie down and when you get up” has been resolved into two specific times (“the entrance of the day and of night”), the actual words to

be spoken remain unspecified (“I shall speak of His laws”), just as in Deut 6:7 (“and speak about them”). The same is true of the *Letter of Aristeas* (late second or first century BCE): “He also commands that on going to bed and rising, men should *meditate on the ordinances of God*” (160).

A similar sort of reading is connected to another famous passage in Deuteronomy:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a goodly land, a land of rivers and fountains and torrents gushing forth in hill and vale; a land of wheat and barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olives and honey; a land where you may eat food without stinting, since you will lack nothing there; a land whose stones are [rich in] iron and from whose hills you shall mine copper. And you will eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your God for the goodly land which He has given you. (Deut 8:7-10)

No doubt a first-time reader would see the last sentence of this passage as a continuation of the fulsome praise that precedes it: one who inherits all this abundance, it seems to say, will naturally express gratitude for the gift of this goodly land. But of course that is not how this passage is understood. As early as the book of *Jubilees* (early second century BCE), there is evidence suggesting that the last sentence of the passage was understood as a specific commandment, to say a blessing after eating a meal:

And he [Abraham] ate and drank. Then he blessed God Most High, who created heaven and earth and who made all the abundance of the earth and gave it to human beings so that they might eat and drink and bless their Creator (Jub 22:6).

It seems likely that in this case, as so often in *Jubilees*, a particular event in the life of one of Israel’s forefathers is being presented as a

precedent for what was later to become a commandment of the Torah, in this case, that of Deut 8:10. In other words, even at this early date, what might otherwise be seen as a generalized biblical encomium of the land of Israel was already being understood by the author of *Jubilees* as requiring a specific, external act to be performed after eating a festive meal (cf. Jub 2:21).¹⁰ Such a hypothesis is backed up by some of *Jubilees*' contemporaries, for example, Ben Sira's assertion:

Like a sealing-clasp (חורתם) on a purse of gold, so is the praise of God after a wine feast (35:5 [ms. B])

(Here, "sealing-clasp" is meant to imply the act of *sealing* or ending the evening with praise.)¹¹ From only a slightly later period, several texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls—4QDeutⁿ, the so-called "All Souls Deuteronomy," 4QDeutⁱ, and 4Q434a—suggest that the same passage ending in Deut 8:10 was being copied for liturgical use, in all likelihood as part of a fixed practice of reciting a blessing after the meal.¹²

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Some of the above examples highlight another aspect of this "sanctification of daily life": it is not simply a matter of concretizing and specifying, but of connecting divinely given commandments with the quotidian, the everyday. Putting on *tefillin* each day, supporting the Torah scholars in one's midst, saying a blessing after a meal—all these insist that the realm of the sacred is in the here-and-now; commandments that might otherwise seem vague and location-less are to be anchored in daily life. There are further illustrations of this tendency.

The book of Leviticus contains the commandment, "You shall not take revenge or hold a grudge" (Lev. 19:18). On the face of things, this hardly sounds like a prohibition relevant to most people's daily lives. "Revenge," in biblical Hebrew as well as English, smacks of

bloodshed and violence (Gen 4:24, Num 31:2, etc.); perhaps precisely for that reason, it is asserted to be the province of God (Deut 32:35), not men, and the great majority of biblical occurrences of this verb (נק"ם) do in fact refer to divine revenge. Indeed, that would seem to fit well with the prohibition of humans taking revenge in our verse. As for the adjoining prohibition of holding a grudge, is it not mentioned because holding a grudge is simply the starting point of any act of revenge?

Such, however, is not the explanation of these twin prohibitions as found in the tannaitic midrash *Sifra*:

You shall not take revenge: What does taking revenge include? Suppose someone said, "Lend me your scythe," but the other person did not lend it. Sometime later, the second man said to the first: "Lend me your spade." He replied: "I won't lend it to you, just as you would not lend me your scythe." This is what is prohibited by, "You shall not take revenge."
You shall not hold a grudge: What does holding a grudge include? Suppose someone said, "Lend me your spade," but the other person did not lend it. Sometime later, the second man said to the first: "Lend me your scythe." He replied: "This will show you that I'm not like you. You wouldn't lend me your spade [but I'll still lend you my scythe]." This is what is prohibited by, "You shall not hold a grudge."

Here, the prohibition of taking revenge is removed from the realm of theoretical violence and, as it were, domesticated into the sort of petty act that an ordinary person might encounter in the most everyday of circumstances. "Revenge" is defined so as to include almost any tit-for-tat refusal. As for holding a grudge, the described instance would seem to have almost nothing in it worthy of reproof—and yet, even the mild reminder "I'm not like you" is considered a violation of the prohibition of grudges. Here then, a verse in the Torah is deemed to refer to two rather trivial actions, things that might naturally come up in ordinary, daily life—even though, on the

face of things, that might not seem to be what the verse is saying. In the process, what might have seemed a rather vague and generalized prohibition has been concretized to cover two specific (and rather ordinary) *acts*.

One of the commonest forms of connecting everyday occurrences to the divine is the requirement to recite a fixed blessing on various occasions. The Mishnah prescribes a number of such blessings:

A person who sees a place where miracles were wrought for Israel is to say: “Blessed [are You who have] worked miracles for our ancestors in this place.” At a spot from which idolatry has been uprooted, one is to say: “Blessed...who has uprooted idolatry from our land.” For shooting stars, earthquakes, lightning, thunder, or storm-winds, one is to say, “Blessed... whose strength and might fill the world.” For mountains, hills, seas, rivers, and deserts, one is to say, “Blessed...who created the world.” ...For rainfall or the receipt of good news, “Blessed [are You...] the good and the doer or good.” On hearing bad tidings one should say, “Blessed is the true judge.” (m. *Berakhot* 9:1-2)

The requirement to connect the events of this world to God—not only the unusual or awe-inspiring (“shooting stars, earthquakes, lightning, thunder, or storm-winds”) but even more everyday phenomena (seeing “mountains, hills, seas, rivers, and deserts” or even receiving good or bad news)—is clear throughout this chapter of the Mishnah. Indeed, the blessings prescribed in the corresponding chapter of the *Tosefta*¹³ are somewhat more extensive, and many of them are still more obviously rooted in the everyday (“One who sees pleasant-looking people or beautiful trees should say the blessing...”). The effect—to connect the everyday to the divine—is reflected as well in the saying attributed to R. Meir at the end of that chapter:

R. Meir said: There is no one in Israel who is not surrounded by *mitzvot*. He has *tefillin* on his head, *tefillin* on his arm, a

mezuzah at his doorway, and four fringes surrounding him [on his clothing]. It was in reference to these that David said: “With seven [things]¹⁴ each day do I praise You” (Ps 119:164)¹⁵

Perhaps the most striking instance of this tendency is that of *birkhot ha-shahar*, the blessings that are to be said upon getting up in the morning. The things that *all* people do in the morning—wake up, open their eyes, straighten up, put their feet on the floor, start to get dressed, and so forth—all these and more are to be accompanied by a particular blessing (some of them, but not all, fashioned after some biblical description of God). Thus: “Blessed are You, O Lord. . .who enable the blind to see” (Ps 146:8) is said when a person first opens his eyes; “...who straighten those who are bent” (Ps 146:8) when he sits up; “who established the earth upon the waters” (Ps 136:6) when he steps onto the floor; “...who direct a man’s steps” (cf. Ps 37:23) when he begins to walk; and so forth (b. *Berakhot* 60b-61a). There could probably be no more evident instance of rabbinic Judaism’s conscious effort to connect the most ordinary things of daily life to an awareness of the divine.

Once again, the origins of this overall mentality surely go back earlier than the rabbinic period. It is well known, for example, that the Qumran texts feature regular, statutory prayers to be recited at fixed times. The idea of such prayers is so familiar that it is worth recalling what prayer was in an earlier day: a cry for help or words of praise or thanksgiving *tied to particular, usually one-time events*. True, this association of thanksgiving with, specifically, miraculous divine intervention never disappeared;¹⁶ but it was complemented, and eventually surpassed, by the idea of fixed, statutory blessings and prayers tied to the most ordinary occurrences.¹⁷ At Qumran, for example, there were set prayers to be recited each day, morning and evening.¹⁸ The most detailed prayers of this sort are the “Words of the Luminaries,” whose very name¹⁹ suggests their connection to what might be seen as the most ordinary of circumstances, the rising of the sun at dawn. Another, highly fragmentary set of prayers from Qumran likewise highlights the same, everyday event:

And when the sun [goes forth] to illuminate the eart[h], let them bless....

When the sun goe[s f]orth over the [earth, let them bless and utter these words: Blessed is the God of Israel,] who has renewed our joy with the light of day...(4Q503, fragments 33-35, col 1 and 2).

In a famous passage about the Essenes, Josephus offers a description of practices similar to those suggested by these Qumran texts and their focus on the morning sun:

Their reverence toward God is somewhat idiosyncratic. Before the rising of the sun, they speak nothing of everyday matters, but offer certain prayers handed down from their ancestors [and addressed] to it [i.e. the sun], as if beseeching it to rise... (*Jewish War* 2:128-131).²⁰

Noteworthy as well is Philo's description of the regular, communal prayers of a Jewish community called the *Therapeutai*, a group which he describes as "philosophers" who "spend their time pursuing solitude in gardens or solitary fields":

Twice each day they pray, at dawn and in the evening. At sunrise they pray for a fine, bright day, "fine" and "bright" in the true sense of the heavenly daylight which they pray may fill their minds. At sunset they ask that the soul may be wholly relieved from the press of the senses and the objects of sense and, sitting where she [the soul] is consistory and council chamber to herself, pursue the quest of truth....

They stand with their faces and whole body turned to the east and when they see the sun rising they stretch their hands up to heaven and pray for bright days and knowledge of the truth and the power of keen-sighted thinking. After the prayers they depart each to his private sanctuary. (*De Vita contemplativa* 27, 89)

(The connection of these early prayers with the rabbinic *Yotzer Or* in use today is clear enough.) Here then is further early evidence of an early tendency to focus the worship of God on the everyday things of life, and once again through a series of specific, external acts—*external* in the sense that, even for the philosophical, solitary *Therapeutai*, their inner desires are to be expressed concretely each day in the external act of fixed, communal prayer.

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I have suggested that the tendency of Judaism that I have been tracing might be described as the “sanctification of daily life,” but here a minor lexical clarification is in order: there is a difference between sanctity and sanctification. Sanctity is the state of being holy, or what is called in Hebrew *kedushah*. The *sanctity of life*, as expressed in various biblical commandments and incorporated in Jewish practice, is indeed an important notion, but it is different from *sanctification*. Sanctification, in Hebrew as in English, is the act of making or declaring something sacred that *was not necessarily sacred before*, or raising something to a higher degree of sanctity. In Hebrew this idea is expressed through the *piel* form of this verbal root (i.e., with the *dagesh* in the *daleth*): לקדש primarily means to make or declare someone or something holy and so to *transform it or its status*. God thus sanctifies Aaron and his sons to make them fit to serve before Him (Exod 29:1 etc.); presumably, before this they were like everyone else. Similarly, to sanctify (לקדש) the Sabbath means to treat it as holy (Exod 20:8, Jer. 17:24), different from the other days of the week. The sanctification of God’s name (קידוש השם) means to raise it—or Judaism, the service of God—up to a higher level. Examples could be multiplied. Thus, a more accurate phrase for the phenomenon described herein might be the *sanctification of the everyday*.

The everyday is, by definition, not holy: it is ordinary, not special, and normally taken for granted. What is most characteristic of Judaism is that this connection of the everyday things of daily

life to God is not articulated internally, through some wished-for, heightened state of awareness, but externally, through some particular act, binding *tefillin* to one's head and arm, reciting the words of the *Shema*, or uttering a series of blessings as one moves through the routine act of getting up in the morning.²¹

Returning to Morris Kleinberg, his act thus seems to represent both aspects of the sanctification of the everyday that I have been tracing. The very *tefillin* that he has mistaken for a hat are themselves the product of an ancient decision to externalize and concretize a commandment that might otherwise have been understood to refer to an internal act of reflection, and his wearing the head-*tefillin* out from the quiet of his living room into the hurly-burly workaday world represents the intrusion of the sacred into the everyday. This second aspect is certainly as remarkable as the first: that little black box poking its way before him, sticking itself into the secular busyness of lower Manhattan, seems so out of place! And yet it is an appropriate symbol of the insistence that the Torah has everything to do with the everyday.²²

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There is something else worthy of mention in connection with this *tableau vivant*, and that is the mass of detailed requirements associated with Kleinberg's *tefillin*. They have not been made just any which-way, or even solely on the basis of what is specified in the four Torah passages that they contain. To begin with, the little black boxes have to be black, completely black. (It will be recalled that a tiny white spot in the lacquer had caused Kleinberg to bring his arm-*tefillin* to be touched up by someone at the synagogue.) No one knows why this is so; having *tefillin* that are entirely black is one of those practices categorized as a "*halakhah* given to Moses at Mount Sinai," that is, a practice about which there is no disagreement, but also no ancient source. The boxes also have to be made of leather, and tied down with leather straps (likewise completely black). The way the arm part of

the *tefillin* is tied to the upper arm is rather complicated, with the leather strap going from where the box is placed, at the height of one's heart, downwards into a series of seven loops on the forearm and ending in another series of loops and ties on the hand and fingers. All these have to be observed if the biblical commandment is to be deemed properly fulfilled—although, of course, the actual biblical texts say nothing of these loops and ties. The knot at the back of the headband also has to be tied in a specific way and the four parchments of biblical quotes have to have been inserted in a certain order—itsself a matter of dispute—and so on and so forth.

One might well wonder why all these details are necessary. What difference does it make if a person, having already accepted the idea that the apparently metaphorical images of Exod 13:1-10 etc. really refer to attaching actual passages of Scripture to the arm and head—what difference does it make if the person then takes one of those biblical passages or all four or for that matter a whole small-print Bible and binds it onto his arm with straps, snaps, flaps or any other device that could result in attaching those words to his body? And what difference could it make if the straps are black, brown, gray or some other color—what does this have to do with this pious concretization of the Torah's commandment (which specifies no color in particular)? Why keep adding rules and rules and more rules when there does not seem to be any reason to do so? This is indeed part of the "sanctification of the everyday," a kind of sanctifying every last detail.

In the broad perspective, this makes of Judaism a rather unique form of devotion. I happen to know, for example, that Kleinberg's cabdriver, Mr. Tan, is a Buddhist. If he, having ventured to ask about the thing on Kleinberg's head, had gone on to interrogate his passenger about the nature and purpose of *tefillin*, he would certainly have been puzzled by some of the things that Kleinberg would have said—and with good reason. While Buddhism nowadays has split into many quite distinct forms, I think it is fair to say that, in general, it is fundamentally different from Judaism in some obvious respects:

such practices as meditation or various kinds of yoga, the whole notion of liberation and Nirvana, and the doctrines of karma and rebirth are all quite far from mainstream Jewish beliefs and practices. In fact, although quite a few generalizations about Buddhism as a whole would nowadays be open to question, it would not be wrong to suggest that one great underlying theme of classical Buddhism is that of the ultimate disparagement of, and the escape from, the everyday world. One hopes ultimately to escape the cycle of death and rebirth that characterizes this earthly existence; one meditates to empty the mind of everyday concerns, to go *within* in order to enter what is certainly a deeper and truer realm. Judaism, on the contrary, is all about the everyday details: apart from the laws of *tefillin*, Jewish law touches on such topics as the permitted and forbidden uses of electricity on the Sabbath; the minimum quantity of *matzah* that one is required to consume on the first night of Passover; why a neat pile of apples at the side of the road may not be considered abandoned property, but why a similar number of apples scattered over a large enough area can indeed be considered abandoned; and so on and so forth. In all these and myriad other matters, there is simply *the* right way to proceed in one's daily dealings with the everyday world, and this right way goes down to the minutest details. Here, Mr. Tan shakes his head sadly.

One might think that Judaism's two principal "daughter religions," Christianity and Islam, would be closer to Judaism in this respect. Again, generalizations are inevitably only approximately correct, but I think that, despite certain recognizable affinities, neither of these faiths can quite compete with Judaism's total devotion to the little, niggling details of daily life as the focus, and locus, of one's dedication to following the divine will. It is not that these other traditions are not sometimes interested in niggling details, but those details have a somewhat different quality. Early Christians seem to have preferred arguing about shades of meaning in creeds and ideas: the one-letter difference between the doctrines of *homoiousios* versus *homoousios* (that is, the belief that Christianity's founder was of an essence *similar* to that of God as opposed to the belief that his

essence *was the same* as that of God)—this really got out the knives in the fourth century of the common era. True, the practical details of sacraments such as baptism and communion were sometimes the subject of clerical debate, but unless I am mistaken, these were far from the everyday concerns of the faithful. Pilar, the young woman in the coffee shop, is a devout Roman Catholic. Try telling her about *tefillin* some time; she is polite, but deep inside it will all sound to her like a lot of nitpicking superstition. Islam may appear to be a bit closer to Judaism in this respect, but I think it would be fair to say that, apart from matters directly connected to fulfilling the five “pillars of religion” (*arkān a-dān*) in Islam, the nitty-gritty particulars of daily life are not the focus of Muslim piety.

Where does this obsession with (indeed, multiplication of) little details come from? It might not be inappropriate here to go back to the very beginning. In the Exodus narrative, when the Israelites reach Mount Sinai, God approaches the people with what is essentially a deal:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you will become My treasured possession among all the peoples, since all the land is Mine. And you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exod. 19:4-6)

In plain English, in this deal God proposes to adopt Israel as His own special people on condition that they “obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant,” that is, keep the laws that God is about to promulgate. These begin with the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, and then continue with the all the laws that appears in the next three chapters, Exodus 21-23, indeed, with all the laws of the Torah as a whole, 613 by traditional count.

But what seems most significant for our subject is the very next sentence: “And you will be to Me a kingdom of priests (*kohanim*) and

a holy nation.” The import of this sentence is likely to elude modern readers not steeped in the basic reality of the priesthood in ancient times. Gods in much of the ancient Near East did not generally have close relations with ordinary citizens—that would have been far too dangerous.²³ For this reason, the gods were housed in specially constructed palaces (i.e., temples), where their every need was attended to by a trained cadre of religious specialists, the priests. The priests were the ones who operated the temple on a day-to-day basis, and who penetrated to its most sacred parts; it was they who presided over what was the most significant area of divine-human interaction, the offering of animal sacrifices. Such an arrangement characterized Israelite worship as well: the temple priests offered sacrifices and thus acted as the *ex officio* go-betweens between the Deity and the rest of the population. Since they were the ones who were permitted to come close to God, they are therefore referred to as “those who come close to Me” (Lev 10:3).

In the light of this, the proposal in the passage cited that Israel become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” must stand out as utterly strange. It does not seem likely that Exod 19:6 was suggesting that ordinary laymen offer sacrifices and perform the other functions of priests elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Rather, as the context implies, the entire people are to be like *kohanim* and come close to God by scrupulously carrying out divine laws, the same laws that were about to be promulgated at Mount Sinai. In keeping with this, it is striking that the standard phrase “to serve God/the gods,” which in various ancient Near Eastern languages (including biblical Hebrew) refers to the offering of sacrifices, is also used in the Torah to refer to ordinary people *keeping God’s laws* (see Deut 6:13, 10:12–13; 13:5). Such a conception of things appears to be quite unparalleled anywhere else in the ancient Near East.

This obligation to serve God through obedience to His laws is expressed in the Torah in regulations governing the most mundane, everyday details imaginable: the fringes that are to be tied at the corners of four-cornered garments; cloven-hoofed mammals, numerous

species of birds, and the fins and scales of fish; an axe-head that flies off its handle and accidentally kills someone; skin diseases, seminal emissions, menstruant women, sheaves left behind in the field, a muzzled ox on the threshing floor, and quite a bit more. One might argue that the rabbinic love of pinning down detailed instructions, what might sometimes even be called legal *hyper-specification*, is the product of a long evolution, and in a sense this is so. But it is rooted in the very idea that '*avodat ha-Shem*, the service of God, is incumbent on everyone, and the inclusion under that rubric of all the varied laws promulgated in the Torah. Since God was regularly encountered not (or not only) in His earthly sanctuary, but in the everyday keeping of His commandments, distinguishing the right way of keeping them from the wrong way might be deemed as important as following the proper priestly procedure in His temple, sacrificing animals or burning incense in the prescribed fashion.

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All this brings us back once again to the symbolism of Morris Kleinberg on the way to his office. His wearing his *tefillin* instead of his hat that morning did not merely represent the intrusion of what belongs to the inside into the outside, and not merely the intrusion of the sacred into the everyday world, but as well the extension of the sacred to include the most specific little details. What better image is there of Judaism itself, which seeks to serve God not by staring off for twenty years at the mountaintops visible from an isolated monastery, but in all the ordinary little things of daily life, things already mentioned and so many more, governing relations between parents and children, buyers and sellers, neighbors and neighbors? It is here, Judaism says, that '*avodat ha-Shem*, the service of God, is to take place, day after day. People sometimes say that the devil is in the details, but for Judaism the opposite is the case: the divine has everything to do with all those rules governing kosher food, the particular words of blessing that are to be said on encountering a monarch, the proper procedures of sale and purchase, ritual baths,

and so on and so forth. That is what Kleinberg's *tefillin* are doing on a New York street, intruding the realm of the sacred into the honking, smelly world of lower Manhattan.

As for the stares of the passers-by, they are also part of this *tableau vivant*. Judaism's characteristic concretizing of the potentially abstract and sanctifying of the everyday make it, in the broad perspective, a rather strange form of devotion, different from the regular acts of piety practiced in other faiths and for that reason often misunderstood. At the same time, Kleinberg's determined look, along with his lack of awareness of the basic fact of his *tefillin*'s incongruous intrusion into this everyday street scene, are equally important. Although his attention has been, since the moment he woke up this morning, largely focused on carrying out the various commandments that a Jew is to perform every day, he has not spent much time reflecting on anything like my theme of Judaism's sanctification of the everyday. Why not? I know him to be a thoughtful fellow: it is certainly not because he is not otherwise given to reflection. But he is utterly the product of Exod 19:5; what he does every day, his Jewish daily routine, does not call for internal reflection, but external performance of the commandments in all their details. The very essence of Judaism is '*avodat ha-Shem* and, in a way, this itself might be seen as the greatest act of externalizing and concretizing. Without these, Judaism would not be Judaism; indeed, it is precisely this that Scripture epitomizes in its brief command, "Know Him in all your paths" (Prov 3:6).

NOTES

¹ In earlier times, the stated ideal was to wear *tefillin* throughout the day, both inside and outside, although the evidence for this having been followed in practice is somewhat mixed; see S. Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 67-71 and the sources mentioned below, n. 4. It is also said that *tefillin* were sometimes worn outside in combination with a turban or hat; see Tur, OH 41. However, a number of restrictions on the wearing of *tefillin* all day are also mentioned in classical sources (see b. *Shabbat* 49a, Tur, OH 37), so that *tefillin* today are generally worn only during morning prayers.

² See Jeffrey Tigay, "On the Meaning of T(W)TFT," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982) 330; H. Rand "The Etymology of Totafot," *Judaism* 42 (1993) 160-63. However, as M. Weinfeld observed, "It must be admitted that all the ink that has been spilled in the attempt to understand the etymology and original significance of this word has not led to any definite results"—*The Ten Commandments and the Reading of the Shema—the Permutations of a Declaration of Faith* (Tel Aviv: ha-Kibbutz he-Meuhad, 2001), 139.

³ Long after the current practice had been established, the medieval commentator Samuel b. Meir dared to suggest that it was based on a misunderstanding. Citing the first of the four passages, "Bind it for a sign upon your hand..." he observed: "According to the straightforward meaning of the text, it is to be a memorial for you always, as *if* it were written on your hand... Similarly 'as frontlets between your eyes' means like some sort of ornament or gold chain that people customarily put on their foreheads for decoration."

⁴ These have been studied recently in Yehudah B. Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text: Tefillin and the Ancient World* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1998) 55-87. The earliest material evidence of *tefillin* is found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and was first discussed by H. Haberman, "Phylacteries in Antiquity," *Eretz Yisrael* 3 (1954), 174-77, cf. Y. Yadin, "Tefillin (Phylacteries) from Qumran," *Eretz Yisrael* 9 (1969) 60-85. The Qumran *tefillin* arguably go back to the second century. In all, remnants of approximately forty-five separate parchment slips traced to Qumran have been identified as belonging to *tefillin* or *mezuzot*, as well as around twenty-five *tefillin* boxes (battim); see the discussion and sources cited in Cohen, *Tangled Up*, 55-79. The literary evidence for *tefillin* is somewhat ambiguous: see the Septuagint translation of Exodus 13; Letter of Aristeas 157-158; Philo, *SpecLeg* 137-142; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:213. Cohn, *Tangled Up*, loc. cit. expresses doubt that these literary sources refer to physical *tefillin*, but the issue remains controversial. Philo's understanding of this commandment as referring to *tefillin* is maintained in Naomi G. Cohen,

Philo Judaeus: His Universe of Discourse (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1995) 144-155. On who actually wore *tefillin*: S. Stern, *Jewish Identity*, loc cit.; Cohen, 106-124.

⁵ The further specification in Deut. 6:9 and Deut. 11:20 (but *not* found in Exod. 13:1-10 or Exod. 13:11-16), “and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” might have aided in the concretizing reading (see Weinfeld, op. cit., 141-42). See also Othmar Keel, “Zeichen der Verbundenheit,” in P. Casetti et al., *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1981), 165-66. So too, the use of amulets within and outside of Jewish society had a role: Cohen, *Tangled Up*, 45-46.

⁶ *Hilkhot Tefillah*, 1:1.

⁷ On the merismus of Deut. 6:7 see A. M. Honeyman, “Merismus in Biblical Hebrew” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952), 11-18.

⁸ See J. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 830-32, 867-70.

On the covenantal aspect of these words, M. Weinfeld, “Prayer and Liturgical Practice in the Qumran Sect,” in D. Dimant et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 241-58.

¹⁰ See J. Kugel, *A Walk through Jubilees: Studies in the Book of Jubilees and the World of its Creation* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 126.

¹¹ Note that Ben Sira 32:11-13 also refers to blessing God after a banquet, again without specific allusion to Deut 8:10.

¹² See S. A. White, “4QDtn: Biblical Manuscript or Excerpted Text?” in H. W. Attridge et al., *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1990), 13-20; M. Weinfeld, “Grace After Meals in Qumran,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992) 427-40. Not all have found this identification convincing: R. Kimelman, “A Note of Weinfeld’s Grace After Meals,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993) 695-96; D. Falk, “Prayer in the Qumran Texts,” in W. Horbury et al., *Cambridge History of Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 3:865.

¹³ *Tosefta* 6, Erfurt ms. chapter 7; see also b. *Berakhot* 54a-64a.

¹⁴ The verse is apparently being understood in this fashion, rather than the more usual, “Seven times each day do I praise You.”

¹⁵ Cf. b. *Menahot* 43b.

¹⁶ It is often stated as a general principle, e.g. לכם נסים, תהיו אומרים שירה (j. *Pesahim* 10 [37:4]). On the expression “utter praise” (לומר הימנון or sometimes לומר שירה) and some further examples in rabbinic and pre-rabbinic texts: J. Kugel, “Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and the Hebrew of the Second Temple Period” in T. Muraoka and J. F. Elwolde, *Diggers of the Well: Proceedings of the Third International Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 166-77.

¹⁷ E. Fleischer, “On the Beginning of Obligatory Prayer” *Tarbiz* 59 (1990), 397-441.

¹⁸ See 1Q9:26-10:1-8, which specifies fixed prayers to be said each day, morning and evening, as well as at the *tequfot*, the beginnings of months, festivals, New Year, and so forth. In general see Daniel Falk, *Daily, Sabbath and Festival Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); idem, "Prayer in the Qumran Texts," in W. Horbury et al., *The Cambridge History of Judaism* vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 852-76; James Davila, *Liturgical Works: Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 203-38. E. Chazon (ed.), *Liturgical Perspectives: Prayer and Poetry in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium of the Orion Center (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Eileen Schuller "Prayer, Hymnic and Liturgical Texts from Qumran," in E. Ulrich and J. C., VanderKam, *The Community of the Renewed Covenant: the Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1994) 153-71; J. Penner et al., *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). On *berakhot* at Qumran: Eileen Schuller, "Some Observations of Blessings on God in Texts from Qumran," in Attridge et al., *Of Scribes and Scrolls*, 133-43; B. Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Poetry* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1996) 87-103. M. Weinfeld, has explored connections between prayers at Qumran and in rabbinic Judaism: "Prayer and Liturgical Practice in the Qumran Sect," in D. Dimant op. cit., 241-58.

¹⁹ The title "Words of the Luminaries" appears on the back of the first column of 4Q504 and "probably relates to the work's liturgical function as prayers for the days of the week, with...*hamme'erot*, "luminaries," serving as a term for the day, the unit of time for which these prayers were designated (compare Gen 1:14-18)," E. Chazon, "Scripture and Prayer in the 'Words of the Luminaries'" in J. Kugel, *Prayers that Cite Scripture* (Cambridge: Harvard Center for Jewish Studies, 2006), 25-41. These prayers, as well as those designated "festival prayers" (4Q509+505), follow a complex pattern, which integrated daily praise and petition with reflections on events recounted in Scripture—this last an example of what had already become a conventional feature of late biblical prayers. On this phenomenon: Judith Newman, *Praying by the Book: the Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999). See also E. Chazon, "Is *Divrei ha-Me'erot* a Sectarian Prayer?" In D. Dimant et al., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, 3-17; also Davila, op. cit, 239-66.

²⁰ That the prayers are apparently addressed to the sun (instead of addressed to its Creator) is apparently what Josephus means by describing this prayer as "idiosyncratic" (ἰδίωτος), but it seems most unlikely that this is an instance of real sun-worship; cf. the prayer of the *Therapeutai* below. Another opinion: Tessel Jonquière, *Prayer in Josephus* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 54-55.

²¹ Some of the issues raised by this concretizing tendency and religious consciousness were discussed in the well known study of my former teacher and colleague, Isadore Twersky z"l, "Religion and Law," in S. Goitein, ed. *Religion*

in a Religious Age (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 69-82.

²² All the more so because, in an earlier day, to wear *tefillin* into the marketplace and elsewhere was the stated ideal; see above, note 1.

²³ The literature on Mesopotamian temple worship is quite considerable: see in connection with cultic “danger” Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), and more generally A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Revised edition completed by Erica Reiner) (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), 183-97; J. M. Beard and A. North, “Introduction” to their *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World* (London: Duckworth, 1990), 1-14; F. Wiggermann, “Theologies, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in J. Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Scribner, 1995) 1857-70.