

“Wings Of Doves”

Brachos 23a

Rabbi Yaakov Berkowitz

The *gemara* in this week’s *amud* discussed the reverence and respect one is required to give to *tefillin* (phylacteries). Precisely where one can bring it, place it, and wear it are examined at length. We obviously understand that it is a holy object, and therefore subject to rules that a sanctified item deserves, but why are *tefillin* singled out more than others, such as a *mezuzah*, in the extent of this requirement?

Rabbi Yaakov Sikili (13th - 14th century) a well known student of Rav Shlomo ben Avraham (1235-1310) addresses this issue in his book “*Toras Hamincha*”. He explains that *tefillin* are unique in the sense that, although fulfillment of any *mitzvah* protects a person, the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* protects a person even more so. He quotes the Talmud in Tractate *Shabbos* (49a). The *gemara* there recounts that at one time the government made a decree attempting to force Jews to abandon their religion. One of the edicts was against wearing *tefillin*, and anyone found wearing them was to be killed. One officer noticed Elisha wearing *tefillin*. Elisha dashed away, with the officer following close on his heels. As he was running, Elisha took the *tefillin* off and shielded them in his hands. When the officer overtook him, he immediately demanded what was in Elisha’s hands. “They are the wings of doves”, Elisha replied. A miracle occurred and, when Elisha opened his hands, the officer saw that they were indeed doves wings. The *gemara* concludes that just like the wings of the dove serve as protection to the bird’s body, so too the mitzvos serve the Jewish people as protectors.

Rabbi Sikili continues that *tefillin* also serves as a protection for a person in the World to Come. He cites the *gemara* in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah* (17a) that says that even if a person spent his life in this world in sin, *tefillin* will save him from the harshest punishment in the next world and he will eventually inherit eternal life with the *tzaddikim* in Gan Eden.

Therefore, concludes Rabbi Sikili, *tefillin*, which uniquely brings protection to a person both in this world and the next, is accorded additional respect and honor, even more than a *mezuzah* and the like.