

Super Charge Your T'fillin: The Secret's in the Wrap

By

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Introduction

It is the Torah that commands us to perform the Mitzvah of donning T'fillin. And for over 3300 years since receiving the Torah at Sinai, Jewish males age 13 and older have been diligently laying T'fillin virtually every day of their lives. While it is not known why we were commanded to do this ritual, a recently published article in the *Journal of Chinese Medicine* provides evidence that donning T'fillin activates a powerful acupuncture point formula with significant mental and spiritual benefits.¹ This concept potentially opens a window into one of the secrets behind this mysterious Mitzvah.

By definition, anyone carefully donning T'fillin receives mental and spiritual benefits. But to insure this occurs, it is necessary to wrap the retzuah (leather straps) following our Rabbi's guidelines. Done as instructed, the retzuah should contact and stimulate the critical acupuncture points, yielding an elevated level of spiritual consciousness and therefore fulfilling the Mitzvah to its highest degree. But to better contact and stimulate the relatively small acupuncture points, you must know precisely where the points are located and you must always wrap with care.

It is important to realize that I am not recommending any modifications to what is already done. The important acupuncture points already lie along all existing Halachic paths of the retzuah. The purpose of this paper is to simply detail their exact location and succinctly describe how they are best stimulated.

Background

T'fillin it is an ancient ritual that is mentioned four times in the Bible: Exodus 13:9, 13:16, and Deuteronomy 6:8, 11:18. It uses two small leather boxes, each containing the above four biblical paragraphs written on parchment. Each box is attached to a long leather strap called a retzuah that is a minimum of 9mm in width. T'fillin are put on prior to morning prayers except on Shabbat or a Torah-based Festival such as, Shavu'ot, Rosh ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur, the first and last days of Pesach and the first and last days of Sukkoth. (Many do not wear T'fillin on the intermediate days of Pesach and Sukkoth.) One box is placed on the biceps of the weaker arm² while the second is placed on the head.

The order of donning the T'fillin is divided into three operations; wrapping the arm, donning the head T'fillin and wrapping the hand. While I had been taught to don T'fillin prior to my Bar Mitzvah many decades ago³, I had not practiced the ritual with any regularity until I resumed the daily practice roughly 5 years ago. Recently, after getting new T'fillin, I began to focus on how I felt when I wore them, and I noticed that my mind always seemed more focused and clear when I prayed with T'fillin on, rather than off. As a long time practitioner of diverse holistic healing arts, I began to wonder if there was a beneficial mental or health influence of laying T'fillin.

¹ Schram, S, Tefillin: An Ancient Acupuncture Point Prescription for Mental Clarity, *Journal .of Chinese Medicine.*, October 2002, 70.

² During the exodus, it is explained that G-d redeems us "BeChozek Yad", -With the strength of G-d's hand. Because of this, we use the stronger of our two hands to wrap the weaker with the Tefillin of the arm. Another opinion holds that what is weaker needs strengthening, and that is why the weaker arm is chosen.

³ Rabbi Elihu Elefant (718-268-5528)

A clue to the special benefits of T'fillin is found in the fact that while most mitzvot are preceded by the recital of one blessing, there are two different blessings recited with T'fillin. (The Chassidic and Sephardim perform only the first blessing.) In such situations, we expect the mitzvah itself to be multi-dimensional. (Parallel cases include mila, Neirof Chanukah, megilla and erusin.)

The Rambam in Hilkhos T'fillin 4:25 elaborates that a higher religious consciousness must be maintained while wearing T'fillin. Perhaps it is this second aspect - not just donning T'fillin but elevating one's consciousness - that warrants a second blessing.⁴ As we shall see, it is not surprising that this second blessing comes with the donning of the head T'fillin.

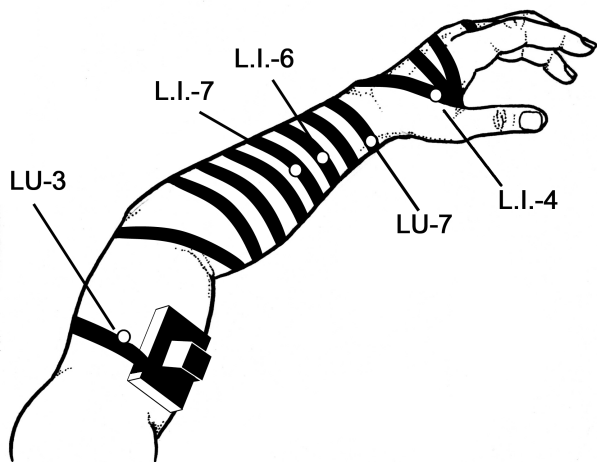
The critical concept is that the higher consciousness maintained while wearing T'fillin is actually facilitated by the placement of the T'fillin themselves.

Brief Overview of Acupuncture

Meridians, or acupuncture channels are invisible paths that course through the body carrying our life force (qi and blood). This flow is fundamental to life and it is said that where qi and blood flow evenly and abundantly, health prevails. Conversely, where qi and blood are lacking or its flow obstructed in any manner, health problems arise.

Specific locations on a channel, called acupuncture points, are used to precisely influence the flow of qi and blood in that channel. But because acupuncture channels cross over and intersect each other in numerous complex ways, points on one channel often influence the flow of qi and blood in other channels. Understanding and utilizing this knowledge goes to the heart of an acupuncturist's practice because point selection is a critical component in any treatment protocol. The coordination of the various selected points forms what is called a point prescription.

Binding the Arm



All acupuncture points are located beneath the skin. While those points near the skin surface are more easily stimulated by the retzuah than points located deeper, to actually stimulate a point, the retzuah must press against it with a moderate pressure - comparable to the feel of a firm handshake. Because of this, many arm points cannot be stimulated by the retzuah, reducing the set of accessible points to a relatively small amount. We can sharpen our point set further by focusing at only those points having a substantive influence on the mind and spirit leaving us with under a dozen points to consider.

The initial blessing is said as the knot and circular loop of the retzuah are tightened to stimulate the first point LU-3. This point helps the mind focus, improves intelligence and enhances memory. It is located on the outer edge of the biceps below the end of the deltoid insertion. It is easily found because the

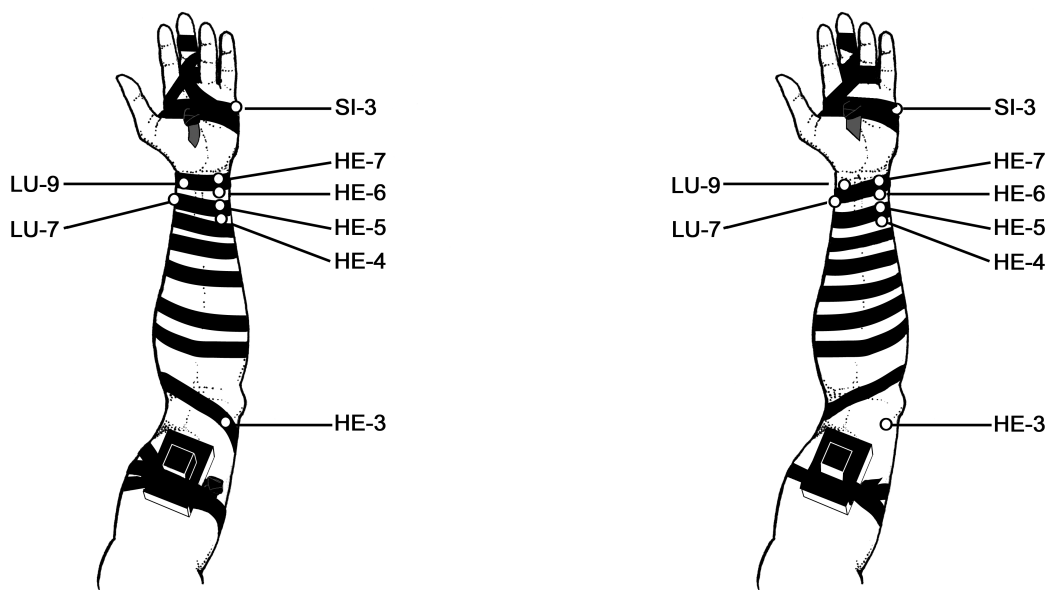
⁴ Rav Moshe Taragin at <http://www.angelfire.com/mi/rothenberg/tefilin.html>

tip of your nose touches this point when you bring your arm across your body while looking forward. It is interesting that both the Sephard and Sephardim top loops naturally press EXACTLY on this point. The three wraps of the upper Shin in the Chassidic style also put additional stimulation here.

All styles except Ashkenazi and one Sephardim variation stimulate the next point, HE-3, which improves memory, steadies the mind and reduces fear and anxiety. It is found on the inside of the arm at the end of the elbow crease (in the depression just anterior and above the medial epicondyle of the humerus). The retzuah automatically contacts this point when wrapping across the end of the elbow crease just above the edge of the topmost bone on the inside of the forearm. The exact point is often a little tender, so look for the tender point and aim to wrap over it as you start to cross the elbow flexure to the forearm.

While there are many health related points stimulated on the upper arm, our focus is on consciousness, which turns our attention to the acupuncture points on the lower forearm where we find three minor points, SI-7, L.I.-6 and L.I.-7. They act in concert to improve the clarity of the spirit while easing fear, anxiety and sorrow. All wrapping styles, (even if sloppy) generally stimulate at least two of these points, with the specific set of points stimulated varying with the wrap style.

The last wrap on the outside of the arm intersects an important point, LU-7. This point is known as the command point for the neck and head and it strongly stimulates brain circulation, which enhances memory. It is located just below the styloid process of the wrist. While it is likely that your retzuah already contact this point, it is best stimulated when the retzuah is in tight contact with the base of the bump.



The four Heart points HE-4, HE-5, HE-6 and HE-7 are a group of important points contacted in the lower forearm. These points affect the spirit and the mind by improving mood, concentration, memory, sleep, speech and sense of well-being. While all styles hit some of them, closer windings in the lower arm will more likely stimulate all of them. The most important is the distal point, HE-7, which calms the heart and mind, balances the spirit, improves memory and aids in concentration. It is capable of

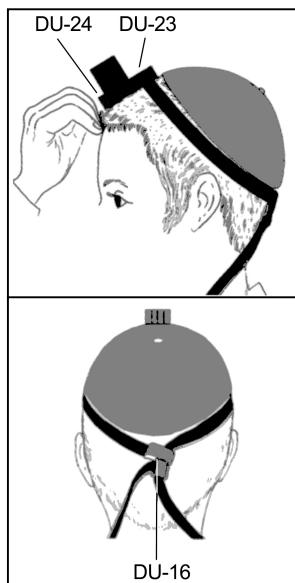
benefiting any mental or spiritual issue. The exact location of this point is in the small hollow space just below the pisiform on the medial edge of the wrist crease. All wrap techniques naturally stimulate this point as the retzuah makes its final wind on the inside of the arm, just under the wrist crease.

The last arm point stimulated is LU-9, just under the wrist crease on the thumb side of the wrist. It reduces agitation and calms the mind. All wrap techniques that wrap away from the body can cross and stimulate this point and it is naturally contacted when the retzuah crosses from the arm to the hand.

At this stage of our arm wrapping, we have contacted and stimulated a number of important points capable of calming and steadying the mind, enhancing memory, balancing the spirit and focusing our consciousness. As we loosely wind the excess retzuah around the middle of the hand, we are prepared to don the head T'fillin.

The Head T'fillin

The placement of the head T'fillin (Shel Rosh) is explicitly defined and to my knowledge, does not differ at all among different segments of the Jewish population. It is always placed midway between the eyes and the base of the Shel Rosh on the forehead is positioned at a point such that the bottom edge remains just inside the hairline. It is interesting that the Rabbis are very specific about the placement of the Shel Rosh because it is the location of the brain. The commentators explain: "the brain is the sanctuary for the mind." Note the similarity between the Chinese statement "The Head is the residence of Intelligence."



The front edge of the Shel Rosh is placed just inside the hairline at a point known in Chinese medicine as DU-24. The weight of the box is a little further back at DU-23. This placement of weight will vary slightly depending on the size of the box. Both of these points balance the mind and are capable of treating all mental diseases.

Placement of the knot on the back of the head is the most critical component of the entire process. It is placed at the back of the head, at the very top and center of the nape of the neck, just below the external occipital protuberance. This point corresponds to DU-16 and it is the most significant point in the entire T'fillin formula because it specifically and directly nourishes and stimulates the brain.

It is important that you tighten the side straps to fix the T'fillin in place. Done properly, you will feel a slight, but steady upward pressure into the base of the skull where the knot pushes up into DU-16.

The combination of the three head points acts as a mental and spiritual focus for the arm points stimulated by the arm wrap. This is an important concept because like all acupuncture points, the arm points all have multiple health functions. It is only upon placement of the head T'fillin that the mental and spiritual aspects of these points are brought to the forefront. I believe that this is part of the reason why the ritual is broken into three parts.

What follows next is very important because when we wrap the hand, we activate special points that enhance and exalt the entire formula. This is the final phase of the T'fillin Mitzvah.

Wrapping the Hand

There are two major points and one channel that are stimulated by the hand wrapping. Different styles do them in different order, but all achieve the same effect.

SI-3 is the most important point on the hand with respect to the mind because it magnifies the actions of the head T'fillin points. This in turn magnifies the mental and spiritual aspects of the arm points. It is located just below the base of the pinky bones where the palm crease (easily seen with the hand slightly cupped) meets the pinky edge of the hand. When you fold the pinky down, a little bulge forms at the end of this crease marking the exact point. This is a small point and you must be careful to let the retzuah cross exactly over the midline crease of the palm as it touches the pinky edge of the hand.

The other major point stimulated on the hand is L.I.-4, which has a powerful calming influence on the mind. It has an additional effect in that it strengthens the effect of ALL the other points in the formula. This relatively large acupuncture point area is located in the fleshy area between the thumb and index finger, closer to the index finger. While both the Ashkenazi and Sephardim hand wrap techniques guarantee the strongest stimulation of this point, all of the wrapping techniques stimulate it too. The key to reaching this point is to wrap the retzuah deep in the fleshy area between the thumb and index finger when you wrap across the hand.

The wrapping of the middle finger is also a major part of the hand wrap. It stimulates a meridian called the Pericardium channel. This channel calms the heart and steadies the mind. While no specific points are stimulated by the retzuah, the wrapping on the middle finger stimulates this channel in general.

Discussion

It is interesting that given the variations of arm and hand wrapping styles found across our cultural boundaries, that all styles still stimulate a set of acupuncture points having very significant spiritual and mental benefits. The only differences are minor with regard to the overall point prescription and the net effect of all styles is to sharpen the mind, calm the spirit, clear one's thinking, improve memory and enhance concentration.

It is important to understand that acupuncture points have very specific locations, and you must be exactly on the point for it to be stimulated. A quarter inch off the position results in missing that point. This means that you must remain aware of where you wrap the retzuah and you must do it carefully. To get the greatest benefit, (because the effects of point stimulation are cumulative), you should wrap exactly the same way every time you don T'fillin.

Donning T'fillin remains a great spiritual mitzvah based on a Torah commandment going back over 3300 years. Because the information presented in this paper is in full accordance with the various Halachic and traditional guidelines, there should be no barrier to the inclusion and application of this knowledge to your ritual use of T'fillin. By stimulating the acupuncture points that already lie along the path of the retzuah, you can bring about a heightened mental clarity to your prayers. The result of doing this can only enhance your mental and spiritual experience, allowing you to fulfill the Mitzvah to its highest degree.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the help, advice and support of a number of people. First is my wife of 24 years, Diane, whose unflagging encouragement made the whole process easier. I especially thank my first teacher, Rabbi Elihu Elefant, who brought me to my Bar Mitzvah in 1964. I'd also like to thank Rabbi

Gideon Shloush⁵ for providing encouragement, editing assistance and publication advice. I also thank Henry Bar-Levav (for insisting that I get new T'fillin) and Rabbi Daniel Dahan⁶ for scribing them. T'fillin diagrams of the Shel Rosh were supplied by Oter Yisrael, 31 Kanfei Nesharim St. Sapir Center, Jerusalem. www.oter-israel.com. And last, but not least, I thank my parents (Ronnie and Harold), who I will always love and respect.

About the Author

Dr. Steven Schram holds dual NY State licensure in Acupuncture and Chiropractic. Prior to establishing his Manhattan private practice in 1984, he earned a Doctorate in Chemistry from the University of Maryland followed by a Doctorate in Chiropractic in 1983 from Life University in Georgia. His formal study of acupuncture was done at the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine in New York City, which he graduated from in 1996.

Address correspondence to:

Dr. Steven Schram
140 East 28th Street (1F)
New York, NY 10016

Website: www.DrStevenSchram.com

Mailto: Steve@handyworks.com

⁵ Rabbi Gideon Shloush at Talmud Torah Aderath El 212-685-0241

⁶ Rabbi Daniel Dahan (Chassidic Rabbi and Scribe) 718-851-2617