

“New” Dead Sea Scroll Tefillin Discovered

AMI TALKS TO PROFESSOR LAWRENCE SCHIFFMAN ABOUT THE NEWLY-DISCOVERED DEAD SEA SCROLLS

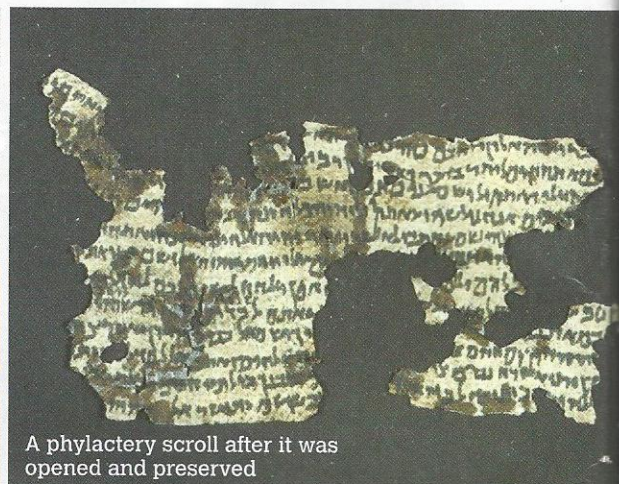
News coming out of Eretz Yisrael that additional Dead Sea Scrolls have been discovered is the talk of the academic world. What is fascinating about this discovery is that the “new” Dead Sea Scrolls are actually several *batim* of *tefillin* dating from the time of the Second *Beis Hamikdash*.

Ami spoke to Professor Lawrence Schiffman, PhD, of Yeshiva University. Dr. Schiffman is considered one of the world’s leading authorities on the Dead Sea Scrolls. He shared his thoughts about the *tefillin* and their implications.

But first, Professor Schiffman felt it important to discuss some aspects of the history of the Dead Sea Scrolls in order to better understand the discovered *tefillin*. “Qumran, the Arabic name for the place where the caves [containing the Scrolls] were located, was home to desert dwellers centuries ago. All of what we call the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are the remnants of 900 scrolls, were found in Qumran. Qumran was home to a group of sectarian Jews identified by most scholars as a group described by Josephus as the Essenes (*Isiyim*).

“They have parallels to the *Tziddukim* although they kept more *halachos* than the *Tziddukim* did. It would take a long scholarly thesis to adequately describe the Dead Sea sectarians; but their ways were very close to what we call the traditional or halachic way of living.

“The Scrolls are often classified into three sections. One-third are texts of



A phylactery scroll after it was opened and preserved

Tanach that were in their library. Another third are works of other Second Temple Jews, some of whom were well known, such as the works of Ben Sira. The last third are their sectarian texts that conform to their own particular ideas. While the Dead Sea Scrolls were all housed at one time or another in the Essene religious center in Qumran around the time of the Second *Beis Hamikdash*, it does not mean that the Scrolls are necessarily Essene in text. In fact, I question whether the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls are actually Essene, as no mention of that name appears in the Scrolls, but that is a different discussion for a different time. There are many texts within the Dead Sea Scrolls that either were owned by the Essenes or were brought by traditional Jews to their center. The sectarian Jews there had a way of converting the Tanach texts into their own dialects of Hebrew. These translations to the other

dialects are not the regular Tanach texts. On the other hand, we have Tanach texts that look like the *nusach hamesorah* that we have. We have no definite reference to these sectarians in *Chazal* and they are the subject of much scholarly debate, as to their level of adherence.

“Dr. Yonatan Adler is a lecturer at Ariel University and is a post-doctoral researcher on Qumran *tefillin* at Hebrew University, so it is appropriate that he was the one who discovered the *batim* of *tefillin*. In truth, they were not discovered in the sense that no one knew these existed. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, there were thousands upon thousands of text fragments and small items, including several *batim* of *tefillin*, which were documented and catalogued. In addition, the process of cataloguing and documenting the Scrolls was one fraught with arguments over who was in charge,

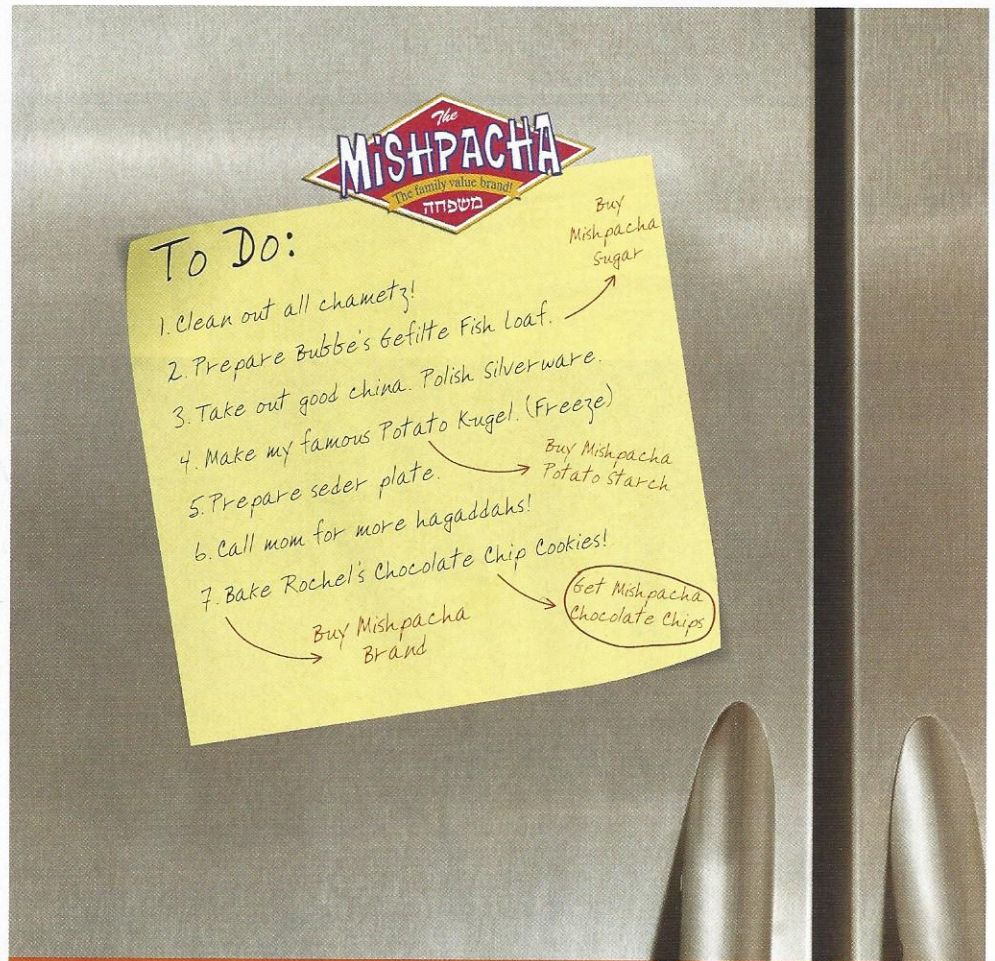
images were photographed by Shai Halevi, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority

thus slowing down the process. In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls as a whole were only made available to the public for viewing after the year 2000.”

Why weren't these *tefillin* “discovered” until now? “Here’s what happened,” explained Professor Schiffman. “There was only one closed *tefillin* that was found in Qumran; all the other *tefillin* were either open or crushed. In most cases, there were either fragmented *tefillin parshiyos* that were found or opened or crushed *batim*. What is fascinating here is that this is a case of crushed *batim* that they didn't realize had *parshiyos* inside.”

Although I do not claim to be a historical scholar, I told Dr. Schiffman how surprised I was to learn that the Dead Sea Scrolls were not only scrolls but *batim* of *tefillin*. “You are right,” Schiffman agreed. “That is not common knowledge, although it isn't a secret. In fact the *tefillin* of the Dead Sea Scrolls were displayed at their last tour here in New York. Yonatan Adler decided he wanted to have a deeper look at all the *tefillin* and *batim*. Not every single item from Qumran is on display. Adler knew about other individual *batim* of *tefillin* and he went looking for them. He found that these *batim* [appeared to still have] the *parshiyos* inside. He actually had them scanned with an MRI machine and it was determined that they hadn't been opened and the *parshiyos* were indeed inside.”

As for viewing the new discovery, “Now they have to try to open them up without ruining them,” explained Schiffman. “Besides their obvious age and the fact that they are rolled up, they are tiny scrolls, like the old German *tefillin*. While one would think opening them up while preserving them is impossible, there are these wonderfully talented women who used to work in the field of papyrology—taking apart papyri in Russia. They know how to moisten things and have all



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kinds of skills.”

Professor Schiffman shared what he feels is the most important meaning behind their discovery. “These *tefillin* are the oldest *tefillin* known to us. They were actually used by *Yidden* during the times of the second *Beis Hamikdash*. We are talking about *tefillin* from the 1st and 2nd century BCE. Looking at the pictures, one can see that although they look slightly different, they still show us that *Yidden* practiced then what we practice now.”

As far as what the Scrolls might actually reveal, Schiffman stated, “We won’t know anything until they’re actually opened. On the one hand, it’s very exciting. On the other hand, the public shouldn’t expect that there’s going to be some new unique information revealed. That’s not going to happen because we already know what *tefillin* during this time period contained. For us it means we’re going to be getting additional evidence about *tefillin*. We might get lucky and find out what the order of the *tefillin* was. In most of the *tefil-*

lin found until now, they were too broken to know the order.

“We do have the order of two *tefillin* from the Bar Kochba collection,” continued the professor, “which were discovered a little later than the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Bar Kochba materials were hidden in the rebellion of 132-135. The Bar Kochba Jews were basically completely rabbinic—they practiced everything the way we do. We got two of their *tefillin* whole—one set like Rashi and one set like Rabbeinu Tam.

I remarked to Dr. Schiffman my amazement that the Qumran *tefillin* look a lot like what I don every morning. “They do and they don’t,” explained the professor. “The *tefillin* we have today have a base and that base is Rabbeinu Tam and not Rashi’sl. The Qumran *tefillin* stood up straight like Rashi, and not sideways like Rabbeinu Tam, but they don’t have a base like Rabbeinu Tam. The one that looks flat might have been a box but it was probably crushed. They were made of very thin leather and are now crushed. It was a

cube, about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch.”

I asked whom he thought these *tefillin* belonged to. “They couldn’t have gotten into these caves unless they belonged to people who came to live in this sectarian religious center. Some of these people came bringing their own *tefillin*, which we assume were exactly like the ones Chazal would’ve had. It could have belonged to a sectarian or a traditional Jew.

Professor Schiffman explained that these *tefillin* are probably the last to be discovered. “Adler is going through every one. He started looking through a list of the *tefillin* that had been discovered and catalogued. He would ask me quite frequently where I thought he could find the *tefillin* that he hadn’t seen yet as they weren’t in the catalogue. He finally found them in the collection in Israel.”

“We have no texts from *Bayis Rishon*,” explained Schiffman. “The Dead Sea Scrolls are a rarity. In *Bayis Rishon* they would have used *kesav Ivri*. Our script is *Ashuri* and all the Qumran *tefillin* are *Ashuri*.”

Professor Schiffman concluded with a message of the eternity of our holy Torah. “What I find amazing is that you can actually see with your very eyes how our forefathers actually wore their *tefillin*. The first time I held a Scroll from Qumran, I was overcome by the feeling that here I was holding something that was 2,200 years old. It becomes very real. The *tefillin* are important, if not from a scholarly perspective, then to show the world how our Torah is eternal.” ●