

# TEFILLIN: AN ANCIENT ACUPUNCTURE POINT PRESCRIPTION FOR MENTAL CLARITY

by Steven Schram

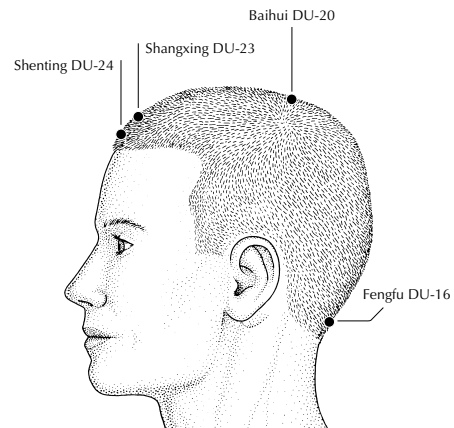
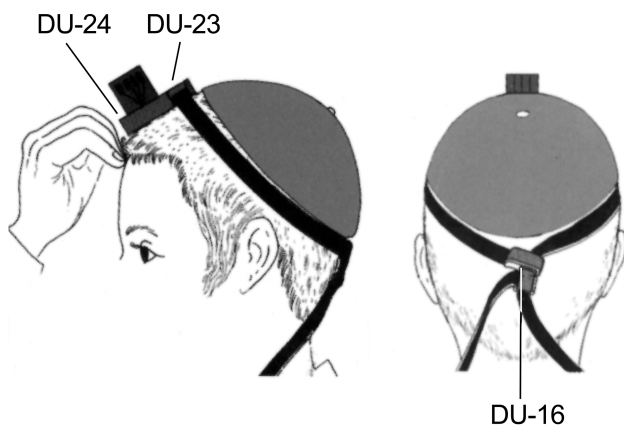
## Introduction

Tefillin is an ancient Jewish prayer ritual that uses two small leather boxes, each attached to a long, 9mm wide, leather strap. One box is placed on the biceps of the weaker arm while the second is placed on the head. The biceps strap is tightly wound along the arm in a carefully prescribed manner. The back of the head strap is tied in a knot and carefully placed at the base of the skull.

The acknowledged purpose of the tefillin is to raise spiritual consciousness of the men who wear it. If we examine where the knots and wrappings are placed from a TCM point of view, it appears that the tefillin and wraps form a potent acupuncture point formula focused on the Governing vessel (Du Mai) and aimed at elevating the spirit and clearing the mind.

## The head tefillin

The head tefillin is the simplest to examine as its positioning is very explicitly defined. The box is always placed midway between the eyes with the base of the tefillin placed on the forehead so the bottom edge remains just inside the hairline. The diagram below shows this location as Shenting DU-24. The weight of the box (several ounces) is a little



further back at Shangxing DU-23; the exact placement of weight will vary slightly depending on the size of the box. The knot in the back (where the strap is tied together) is placed just under the external occipital protuberance. This corresponds to Fengfu DU-16. Once the knot is in place, the side straps are tightened down. This creates a steady upward pressure into Fengfu DU-16 and more pressure on both Shangxing DU-23 and Shenting DU-24.

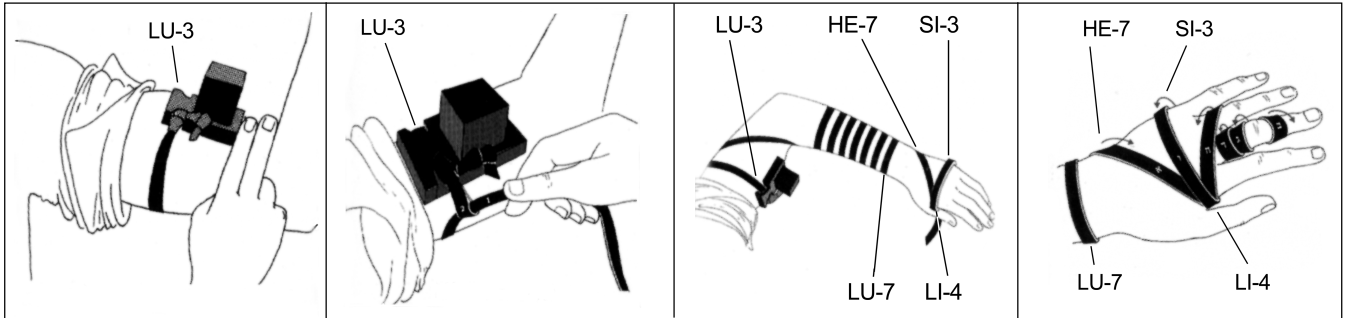
## Binding the left arm

I explored the four major variations in wrapping procedures: Chassidic<sup>1</sup>, Sefardim<sup>2</sup>, Sefard, and Ashkenazi<sup>3</sup>. By experimenting on myself with these different wrapping procedures, I was able to map out the significant acupuncture points that are stimulated through the procedure (see over page).

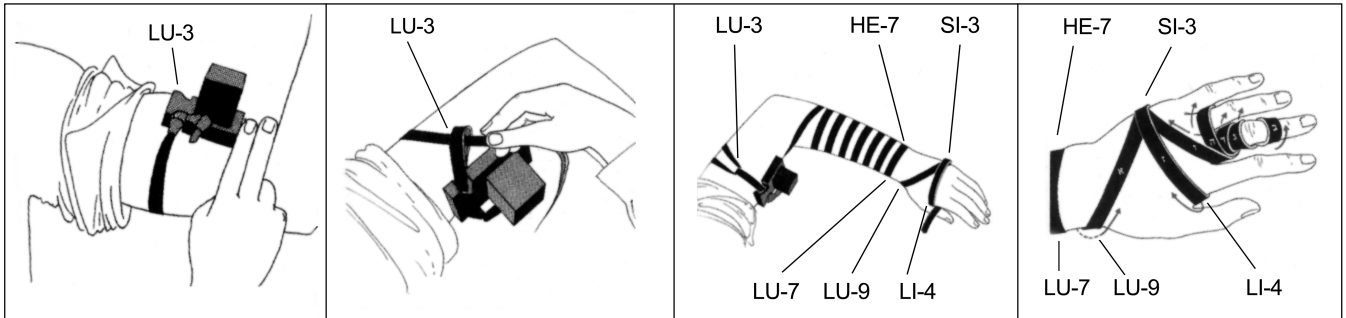
## Point Selection for Analysis

Along with the three skull points already discussed, the tefillin wrap contacts a good number of the over 50 acupuncture points on the arm<sup>6</sup>. However, we will limit our point analysis to those that have a more substantive influence on the mind and spirit<sup>7</sup>. In addition, because the pressure of the arm wrap is mostly felt at points on the

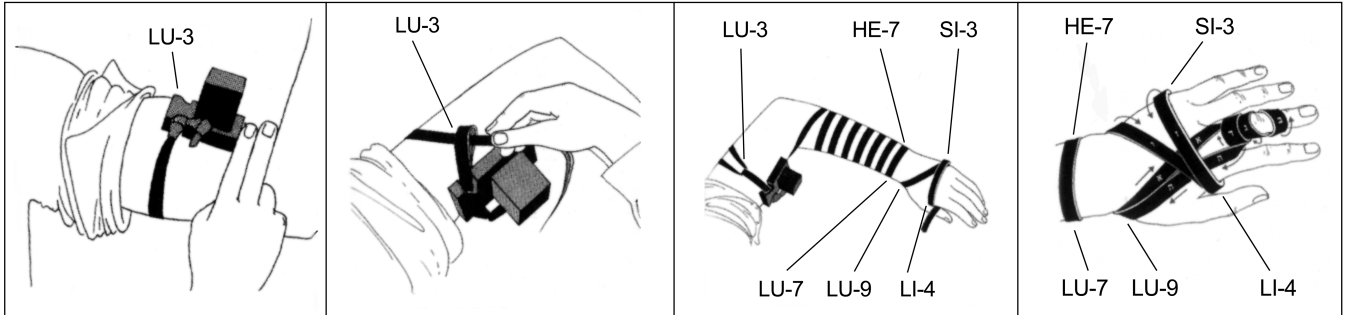
Ashkenazi<sup>4</sup>



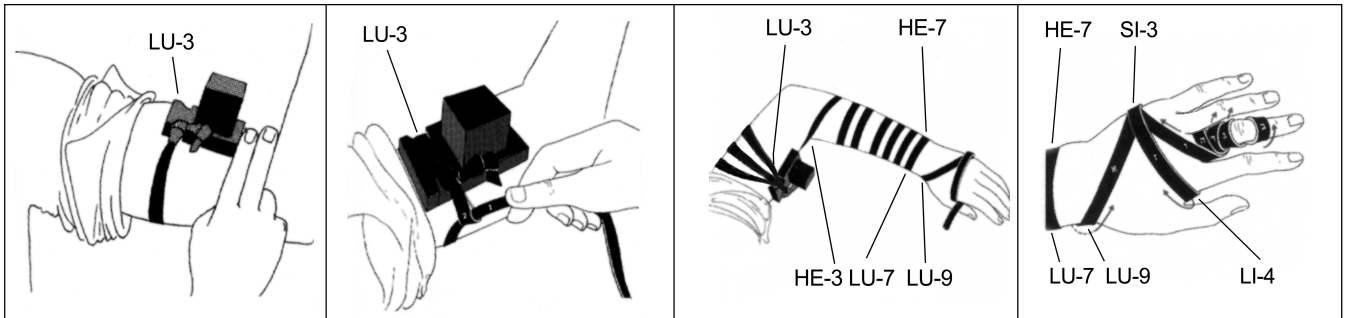
Sefard



Sefardim



Chassidic<sup>5</sup>



outside of the arm bones we have excluded general points on the Pericardium and Triple Burner channel. That leaves us with the points shown on the Tables to the right. The points are listed in the order in which they are initially stimulated.

**Tefillin point formula comparison**

A set of point formulas for each of the methods arises from our analysis:

*Chassidic:* Tianfu LU-3, Shaohai HE-3, Chize LU-5, Zhizheng SI-7, Wenliu L.I.-7, Pianli L.I.-6, Lieque LU-7, Shenmen HE-7, Taiyuan LU-9, Shenting DU-24, Shangxing DU-23, Fengfu DU-16, Hegu L.I.-4, Houxi SI-3, Pericardium channel.

*Ashkenazi:* Tianfu LU-3, Zhizheng SI-7, Wenliu L.I.-7, Pianli L.I.-6, Lieque LU-7, Shenmen HE-7, Taiyuan LU-9, Shenting DU-24, Shangxing DU-23, Fengfu DU-16, Hegu L.I.-4, Houxi SI-3, Pericardium channel.

*Sefard:* Tianfu LU-3, Shaohai HE-3, Chize LU-5, Zhizheng SI-7, Wenliu L.I.-7, Pianli L.I.-6, Lieque LU-7, Shenmen HE-7, Taiyuan LU-9, Shenting DU-24, Shangxing DU-23, Fengfu DU-16, Hegu LI-4, Houxi SI-3, Pericardium channel.

*Sefardim:* Tianfu LU-3, Shaohai HE-3, Chize LU-5, Zhizheng SI-7, Wenliu L.I.-7, Pianli L.I.-6, Lieque LU-7, Shenmen HE-7, Taiyuan LU-9, Shenting DU-24, Shangxing DU-23, Fengfu DU-16, Hegu L.I.-4, Houxi SI-3, Pericardium channel.

Points Fengfu DU-16, Tianfu LU-3, Houxi SI-3, Hegu

Stimulation of acupuncture points on the arm				
	Chassidic	Ashkenazi	Sefard	Sefardim
LU-3	X	X	X	X
HE-3	X		X	X
LU-5	X		X	X
SI-7	X	X	X	X
LI-6	X	X	X	X
LI-7	X	X	X	X
LU-7	X	X	X	X
HE-7	X	X	X	X
LU9	X		X	X

L.I.-4 and the Pericardium channel (from wrapping the middle finger) always have more stimulation than others. Also, wrist points including Taiyuan LU-9 and Shenmen HE-7 receive stronger pressure compared to the other points on the body of the forearm. Thus a more honed formula of the more significant points is as follows:

*Chassidic:* Tianfu LU-3, Fengfu DU-16, Lieque LU-7, Shenmen HE-7, Taiyuan LU-9, Houxi SI-3, Hegu L.I.-4, Pericardium channel.

*Ashkenazi:* Tianfu LU-3, Fengfu DU-16, Lieque LU-7, Shenmen HE-7, Houxi SI-3, Hegu L.I.-4, Pericardium channel.

*Sefard:* Tianfu LU-3, Fengfu DU-16, Lieque LU-7, Shenmen HE-7, Taiyuan LU-9, Houxi SI-3, Hegu L.I.-4, Pericardium channel.

*Sefardim:* Tianfu LU-3, Fengfu DU-16, Lieque LU-7, Shenmen HE-7, Taiyuan LU-9, Houxi SI-3, Hegu L.I.-4, Pericardium channel.

Note that there is essential agreement and overlap between the honed point prescriptions called for by the four different tefillin wrapping techniques. The only difference is that the the Ashkenazi style excludes Taiyuan LU-9. This should have little clinical significance, given the scope of the remaining points in the formula.

### Point and channel discussion

- The Governing Vessel (Du Mai) is an extra-ordinary meridian that runs up the spine and penetrates the brain. It is well known for its ability to treat psychiatric disorders and influence the mind<sup>8</sup>. The Spiritual action of points on the Governing vessel can be explained because it has the closest relationship with the brain, which, according to pre-*Inner Classic* and later Daoist traditions is considered to be the seat of the spirit. A further connection of the Governing Vessel to Spirit is found from its anterior pathway, which directly connects it to the more traditional home of Spirit, the Heart.

- *Fengfu DU-16* (Wind Mansion) is also known as Gui Zhen, which translates as Ghost Pillow<sup>9</sup>. It has also a point in the Window of Heaven category<sup>10</sup>. According to channel theory, Fengfu DU-16 is where the Governing vessel penetrates the brain. It is one of two points (the other being Baihui DU-20) that directly nurture the brain and spinal cord. The therapeutic scope of Fengfu DU-16 is quite wide and it is known to strongly benefit both concentration and memory. It also

Stimulation of acupuncture points on the head				
	Chassidic	Ashkenazi	Sefard	Sefardim
DU-24	X	X	X	X
DU-23	X	X	X	X
DU-16	X	X	X	X

Stimulation of acupuncture points on the hand				
	Chassidic	Ashkenazi	Sefard	Sefardim
SI-3	X	X	X	X
L.I.-4	X	X	X	X
Pericardium	X	X	X	X

treats dizziness, stroke, aphasia and headache. In psychotic patients, it reduces the desire for suicide and for self-mutilation. Fengfu DU-16 is also a point on Yang Linking vessel that connects all heavenly rising Yang energy.

- *Shangxing DU-23* (Upper Star) is also known as Gui Tang which translates as Ghost Hall. It treats psychosis, headaches, and nearsightedness. It is also the root of the sinus and is very effective in treating loss of smell. Since the olfactory nerve is the first of the 12 cranial nerves, its use in this manner clearly indicates a profound effect on the brain.

- *Shenting DU-24* (Spirit Court) is also known as Tianting (Courtyard of Heaven) calms the mind and balances the spirit. It can be used to treat any mental disease<sup>11</sup>. Like other points of the Governing vessel, it has a strong action on calming the spirit and treating epilepsy and other mania disorders. According to Daoist tradition, this point can connect directly to Niwan (Mud Ball), which is considered to be the location of the physical basis of the spirit. "The qi of the Heart is connected with the Niwan Palace above."<sup>12</sup>

The significance of Niwan, also known as Huangting (Yellow Courtyard) is emphasized in the *Classic on the Central Void in the Inner Sphere* which said, "The origin of essence-spirit in the brain is also called Niwan" and also "The entire spirit that expresses in the face has its origin in Niwan".<sup>13</sup>

- *Houxi SI-3* (Back Ravine) is the most important point on the hand with respect to the mind because it is the opening point to the Governing vessel. It frees and moves qi in the Governing vessel and acts as a multiplier that strengthens the actions of the vessel's points (Fengfu DU-16, Shangxing DU-23 and Shenting DU-24) already stimulated by the head tefillin. Alone or in combination with other points, it clears the spirit, treats any kind of psychosis including loss of memory, dementia, sorrow or fear.

- *Zhizheng SI-7* (Branch of the Upright) is the luo connecting point of the Small Intestine channel, connecting to the Heart channel. It has a pronounced effect on regulating and calming the shen. It helps relieve anxiety, fear and sorrow.

- *Hegu L.I.-4* (Union Valley) is the command point of the head and face. It is used to treat all conditions of the head, face, sinuses or eyes. It has a powerful calming and anti-spasmodic effect and is widely used in relieving pain. It has a strong influence on the mind and has the ability to soothe the mind and calm anxieties. It is widely used in combination with other points because it strongly enhances the

movement of qi and strengthens the effect of other points in the point formula.

- *Pianli LI-6* (Veering Passage) and *Wenliu LI-7* (Warm Flow) are both used together to treat any mental disorder, and in particular, improve the clarity of the spirit.
- *Tianfu LU-3* (Heavenly Residence) is the first point stimulated when one starts the process of wrapping the tefillin. It is an important point in treating the mind and is in a special point category called Window of Heaven points. The points in this grouping all have psychological and spiritual benefits.
- *Chize LU-5* (Cubit Marsh, aka Gui Tang: Ghost Hall) treats panic and anxiety. As a Ghost point, it has the effect of clearing the mind and enhancing concentration. It can promote qi and blood circulation in the head and face.<sup>14</sup> All wrap techniques except Ashkenazi intersect and stimulate this point
- *Lieque LU-7* (Broken Sequence) is the command point of the head and neck and it is capable of improving circulation in the brain. Its primary mental function is related to stimulating memory. It is both the Luo point to the Lung channel connecting to the Large Intestine channel and also the opening point for the Conception vessel.
- *Taiyuan LU-9* (Great Abyss aka Gui Xia: Ghost Heart) is the yuan-source of the Lung channel. It treats agitation and is very calming to the mind.
- *Shaohai HE-3* (Lesser Sea) improves memory and decreases fears and anxiety.
- *Shenmen HE-7* (Spirit Gate) treats all mental disorders equally well. It is a primary point to calm the heart and mind, balance the spirit and improve memory and concentration. Because Lingdao HE-4, Tongli HE-5, Yinxi HE-6 and Shenmen HE-7 are located very close together, windings like the Chassid technique for the lower arm are more likely to stimulate all of these points.
- The Pericardium Channel calms the heart and steadies the mind. Even though no specific points are stimulated, the wrapping of the middle finger stimulates this channel in general. The Sephardim wrap stimulates this channel the strongest.

### Discussion

If someone handed an acupuncturist the above point formula and asked what was being treated, there is little doubt that mental and shen issues would be a strong part of the pattern. What is surprising is that such a point formula would be found in a non-Chinese procedure that has been continuously practised for many thousands of years. It may be that the originators of the tefillin ritual had some inkling of its special effects, even though they may have lacked the depth and specific knowledge we have today.

The order of wrapping is also very interesting in that the entire arm is not wrapped at once, but stopped prior to stimulating the hand points of the Pericardium Channel as well as Houxi SI-3 and Hegu L.I.-4. These points are added only after Fengfu DU-16, Shangxing DU-23 and Shenting DU-24 have been added to the point formula. Perhaps this

is a subtle clue to our present day practice of acupuncture, recommending to us that we add the point multipliers towards the end of our treatment protocol. This concept deserves further exploration.

Regardless of the belief system behind the procedure, it seems clear that putting on tefillin is a unique way of stimulating a very precise set of acupuncture points that appears designed to clear the mind and harmonise the spirit.

### References

- 1 Personal instruction from Chassid Rabbi Daniel Dahan 718-851-2617
- 2 Personal instruction from Sefardim Rabbi Gideon Shloush at Talmud Torah Adereth El, 212-685-0241
- 3 Personal instructions given to me 37 years ago by Ashkenazi Rabbi Elihu Elephant
- 4 Oter Yisrael, 31 Kanfei Nesharim St. Sapir Center, Jerusalem: <http://www.shemayisrael.co.il/tefillin/index.htm>
- 5 Detailed instruction can be found at <http://www.sichosinenglish.org/books/bar-mitzvah/05.htm>
- 6 Ellis, Wiseman, Bose, Paradigm, *Fundamentals of Chinese Acupuncture*, Paradigm Publications, 1991 p 48 & 50.
- 7 Sionneau, Philippe, The Treatment of Psycho-emotional Disorders With Traditional Chinese Acupuncture, Private Seminar, New York City, June 8th & June 9th, 2002, presented by Soho Herbs and Acupuncture
- 8 Deadman, P and Al-Khafaji, M, The Treatment of Psycho-Emotional Disturbance by Acupuncture with particular reference to the Du Mai, *Journal of Chinese Medicine*, January 1995 47 p.30
- 9 Yong, H., Treating Mental Disorders with Acupuncture and Moxibustion: An Introduction to the Achievement of Hu Lingxiang, *Int'l J. of Clinical Acupuncture*, 1995 6:2, 143 (Sun Simiao of the Tang Dynasty and Xu Qiu-fu of the Song Dynasty each proposed 13 Ghost points. GV-16 is in both systems.)
- 10 Deadman, P and Al-Khafaji, M, The Points of the Window of Heaven, *Journal of Chinese Medicine*, September 1998, 43.
- 11 Sionneau, Philippe, Ibid.
- 12 *Classic Collected Wisdom by Master Magic Sword*, quoted in Deadman, P and Al-Khafaji, M, *A Manual of Acupuncture*, Journal of Chinese Medicine Publications, September 1998.
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- 14 *Ling Shu*, Chapter 21.