

# Michal / מיכל

## Biblical Text

Saul's sons were: Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchishua; and the names of his two daughters were Meirav, the older, and Michal, the younger.

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David replied to Saul, "Who am I...that I should become Your Majesty's son-in-law?"

But at the time that Meirav, daughter of Saul, should have been given to David, she was given in marriage to Adriel the Meholathite.

Now Michal daughter of Saul had fallen in love with David; and when this was reported to Saul, he was pleased. Saul thought: "I will give her to him, and she can serve as a snare for him, so that the Philistines may kill him." So Saul said to David, "You can become my son-in-law even now through the second one."

..David was pleased with the idea of becoming the king's son-in-law...David went out with his men and killed two hundred Philistines; he brought their foreskins and they were counted out for the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. Saul then gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.

When Saul realized that Adonai was with David and that Michal daughter of Saul loved him, Saul grew still more afraid of David; and Saul was David's enemy ever after.

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Saul urged his son Jonathan and all his courtiers to kill David. But Saul's son Jonathan was very fond of David, and Jonathan told David, "My father Saul is bent on killing you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; get to a secret place and remain in hiding. I will go out and stand next to my father in the field where you will be, and I will speak to my father about you. If I learn anything, I will tell you."

So Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul... Saul heeded Jonathan's plea, and Saul swore, "As God lives, he shall not be put to death!" Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all this. Then Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he served him as before. Fighting broke out again...David fled and got away. That night Saul sent messengers to David's home to keep watch on him and to kill him in the morning. But David's wife Michal told him, "Unless you run for your life tonight, you will be killed tomorrow."

Michal let David down from the window and he escaped and fled.

Michal then took the household idol, laid it on the bed, and covered it with a cloth; and at its head she put a net of goat's hair.

Saul sent messengers to seize David; but she said, "He is sick."

Saul, however, sent back the messengers to see David for themselves. "Bring him up to me in the bed," he ordered, "that he may be put to death."

When the messengers came, they found the household idol in the bed, with the net of goat's hair at its head.

Saul said to Michal, "Why did you play that trick on me and let my enemy get away safely?"

"Because," Michal answered Saul, "he said to me: 'Help me get away or I'll kill you.'"

David successfully escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel went and stayed at Na'ot.

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When David heard that Nabal was dead, he ... sent messengers to propose marriage to Abigail [Nabal's widow], to take her as his wife. When David's servants came to Abigail at Carmel and

told her that David had sent them to her to make her his wife, she immediately bowed low with her face to the ground and said, “Your handmaid is ready to be your maidservant, to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.” Then Abigail rose quickly and mounted a donkey, and with five of her maids in attendance she followed David’s messengers; and she became his wife. Now David had taken Ahinoam of Jezreel; so both of them became his wives. Saul had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to Pal-ti son of La-ish from Gallim.

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Avner immediately sent messengers to David, saying, “To whom shall the land belong?” and to say [further], “Make a pact with me, and I will help you and bring all Israel over to your side.” He replied, “Good; I will make a pact with you. But I make one demand upon you: Do not appear before me unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come before me.”

David also sent messengers to Ish-boshet son of Saul, to say, “Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid the bride-price of one hundred Philistine foreskins.” So Ish-boshet sent and had her taken away from [her] husband, Pal-ti-el son of La’ish. Her husband walked with her as far as Bahurim, weeping as he followed her; then Avner ordered him to turn back, and he went back.

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Thus David and all the House of Israel brought up the Ark of God with shouts and with blasts of the horn. As the Ark of God entered the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and whirling before God; and she despised him for it....David went home to greet his household, and Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, “Didn’t the king of Israel do himself honor today—exposing himself today in the sight of the slavegirls of his subjects, as one of the riffraff might expose himself!”

David answered Michal, “It was before God who chose me instead of your father and all his family and appointed me ruler over God’s people Israel! I will dance before God and dishonor myself even more, and while I may be low in your esteem; but I will be honored among the slavegirls that you speak of.”

Until her dying day Michal, daughter of Saul, had no children.

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Instead, the king took ... the two sons that Ritzpah, daughter of Ayah bore to Saul, and the five sons that Merav (some texts say: Michal), daughter of Saul bore to Adriel...and he handed them over to the Gibeonites. They impaled them on the mountain before God; all seven of them perished at the same time. They were put to death in the first days of the harvest, the beginning of the barley harvest.

I Samuel 4:49; 19:1-18; 20-29; 25:40-44; II Samuel 3:13-16; 6:15-23; 21:8-9

**מי כאל? = מיכל = who is like God?**

The Sages taught in a baraita: Rahab aroused impure thoughts by her name, i.e., the mere mention of her name would inspire lust for her; Yael, by her voice; Abigail, by remembering her; Michal, the daughter of Saul, by her appearance. -- Talmud Megillah 16b

Surely it is written, “and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul whom she bore to Adriel...” — Rabbi Yehoshua answers: Was it then Michal who bore them? Surely it was rather Meirav who bore them! Meirav bore, and Michal brought them up; therefore they were called by her name. This teaches us that whoever brings up an orphan in their home, Scripture ascribes it to them as though they had begotten the child. - Talmud Sanhedrin 19b

## Michal as Eglah עִגְלָה

עגל = calf, also circular/cyclical

“And Rachel was in hard labor.” (Gen. 35:16) Three experienced hard labor and died: Rachel, the wife of Pinchas’s, and Michal the daughter of Saul....Michal, for it is written, “And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child until the day of her death (II Sam. 6:23). Thus it is written, “And the sixth, It’re’am, of Eglah, David’s wife (II Sam. 3:5). Why is Michal called Eglah? Because [as she labored,] she cried out like a calf (eglah) and died. - B’reisheet Rabbah 82

The Gemara challenges the notion that David had only six wives. There was also Michal, and so he had at least seven wives. Rav said: One of those six wives, Eglah, is Michal, and why was she called Eglah in the verse? It was because she was dear to him like a calf [eglah], and so the verse states that Samson referred to his wife with the same term: “If you had not plowed with my calf you would not have found my secret” (Judges 14:18). The Gemara asks, How is Eglah also Michal? Michal didn’t have any children, as it is written: “And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child until the day of her death” (II Samuel 6:23)? Rav Hisda said: Until the day of her death she had no child, but on the day of her death she had a child. - Talmud Sanhedrin 21a

## Michal and Tefillin

All are commanded to put on tefillin except women and bondsmen. Michal the daughter of Kushi would wear tefillin. Jonah’s wife would go up (to Jerusalem) for the festival. Tavi, R. Gamliel’s bondsman would wear tefillin. – Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael 13:9

It was taught in a baraita: Michal, daughter of Kushi, King Saul, would don tefillin, and the Sages did not protest against her behavior, as she was permitted to do so. Similarly, Jonah’s wife would undertake the Festival pilgrimage and the Sages did not protest against her practice. From the fact that the Sages did not protest against Michal’s donning phylacteries, it is apparent that these Sages hold that tefillin is a positive mitzvah not bound by time, i.e., it is a mitzvah whose performance is mandated at all times, including nights and Shabbat. –Talmud, Eruvin 96a

From where do we know that women [are exempt from Tefillin]? From the verse “And you should teach it to your sons” (Deuteronomy 6:7) – meaning, not to your daughters. One who is obligated to learn Torah is obligated to wear Tefillin, but women, who are not obligated to learn Torah, are not obligated to wear Tefillin. But what about Michal bat Kushi who wore Tefillin, and the wife of Jonah who went on the pilgrimage, and the Sages didn’t protest? Rabbi Chizkiyah said, quoting Rabbi Abahu, “Jonah wife returned, and [as for] Michal bat Kushi, the Sages did protest.” - Jerusalem Talmud Berakhot 14b:1

The mitzvah [of tefillin] is applicable in all locations and all time periods, to men, but not to women, for it is a positive mitzvah which is time related. Nevertheless, if they wish to lay tefillin, we do not object, and they receive reward. But not like the reward of a man, for the reward of one who is commanded and performs [that mitzvah] cannot be compared to the reward of one who is not commanded and performs [that mitzvah anyway.] And in Tractate Eruvin...the Sages of Blessed Memory said that Michal the daughter of Kushi would lay tefillin, and the Sages did not object. And there they said that the wife of Jonah would go up to Jerusalem [wearing tefillin] and the Sages did not object. -Sefer HaChinuch (positive Mitzvah 421)

So too, it says in the beginning of the chapter Hamotzee Tefillin (one who finds Tefillin) that Michal Bat Shaul donned Tefillin and the Rabbis did not rebuke her; even though one Pesikta says the opposite, that they did rebuke her, nonetheless, we follow our Talmudic source.

- Olat HaTamid 38:4

The career of the one well-known female *zaddik*, Hannah Rochel Verbermacher (1806?–1888?), the famous ‘Maid of Ludmir’, falls in the nineteenth century but it is worth a brief mention in this context. Hannah Rochel is often thought to demonstrate the limits of Hasidic ‘egalitarianism’. She was very well-educated and extremely pious, and, around 1825, she used her inheritance to build her own study house (*beys medresh*) in Ludmir in the Ukraine, just as a male *zaddik* would. There she gave lectures, received petitioners, and used to pray wrapped in the *tsitsit* (fringed shawl) and wearing the *tefillin* (phylacteries), traditionally required of men only.<sup>53</sup> She is also thought to have gone to other towns to preach to women, and was renowned for her ecstatic praying as well as for her healing miracles. She drew a substantial following, but within a few years male *zaddiks* began uniting against her and saying she was possessed by a *dybbuk* (a malign spirit). A good many of the details are lacking, but as a result of the furore and the pressure brought to bear upon her, Hannah Rochel came to feel that she had lost her powers. This was not the end of the Maid of Ludmir’s story, however. Some decades later, around 1859, Hannah Rochel emigrated to Jerusalem. Once there she seems to have resumed her public religious activities, attracting numerous adherents, most of them older Ashkenazi, Sephardic and even Muta’rabi (Arab-speaking) women, receiving supplicants, holding court on Sabbath afternoons ‘according to the custom of the *rebbe*s from Poland’, studying daily, and leading popular pilgrimages to Rachel’s Tomb, where she would recite *tkines* and sometimes hold all-night prayer vigils. She is also said to have attracted Muslim women devotees, which would not be all that odd, given the ecumenical nature of this kind of apotropaic and petitionary faith. Though it is still not known exactly when Hannah Rochel died, women were still praying and making supplications over her grave (thought to be on the Mount of Olives) as late as 1936, almost a half century after her death.<sup>54</sup>

- Margaret Hunt, *Women in 18th Century Europe*, p.236

There is ample halakhic justification for allowing women to wear Tefillin...the overwhelming halakhic evidence teaches us that women may wear Tefillin like Mikhal bat Shaul and some righteous women in France, Italy, eastern Europe and Israel, and we do not protest.

- Rabbi David Golinkin, *The Status of Women in Jewish Law*, 2012

We create an environment at camp of sh’mirat mitzvot (observing the commandments) which includes daily t’filah (prayer). We wear tallitot (ritual prayer shawls) and t’fillin (phylacteries). We encourage female campers of Bat Mitzvah age who wear them at home to bring them to camp. All male campers and staff beyond the age of Bar Mitzvah are required to bring their own Tallit and Tefillin and to wear them during morning services. If you have questions about purchasing Tallit and Tefillin, please be in touch with our office.

*Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, Current website*



This summer, we piloted a new tefillin program to encourage campers and staff of all genders to wear tefillin. Shayna Golkow, rising senior JTS rabbinical student and former Rosh Eidah, ran programming and discussions for every age group. [Our younger campers] learned about tefillin, designed their own Shema “scrolls,” and created their own “practice tefillin” with their personalized scrolls inside. [Our older campers] learned about tefillin as a way of wearing their values and serving as a constant reminder of what is important to them. All campers from [the youngest to the oldest] learned how to wrap tefillin. In addition, new posters are now hanging in every makom tefillah detailing how to wear a tallit and tefillin. These posters feature pictures of a woman at each step in the process, and they allow more campers and staff to learn the proper way to wrap tefillin.



With all of [our bunk staff], we held discussions about the staff's unique role in creating camp culture and bravely shifting norms to reflect our egalitarian values. These discussions continued beyond the formal sessions and became hot topics among our staff! Several female counselors decided to take on the mitzvah of tefillin as a way of being dugmaot (role models) for their campers.

By the end of the program, 27 girls and women who had not previously been wrapping tefillin decided to wrap tefillin during the summer! We hope that these discussions continue to impact and improve our egalitarian camp culture. *Camp Ramah in the Poconos, FB post, 2018*

That is why my tefillin are the perfect example of my Jewish identity. What could be more Jewish than wearing boxes of Torah on my body...and what could be more feminist than doing something that is meaningful for you when many people think you should be excluded from it because of your gender?

I'm not going to lie; I only wear my tefillin at camp. And even at camp I struggle to put them on regularly: I am not forced to, they're a lot of work to put on early in the morning, and most of the time I don't connect to tefillin or prayer very strongly. But because I only wear them when I obligate myself, wearing tefillin feels all the more special to me.

A big part of my Jewish feminism is the reconciliation of and the meaningful connection between these two key parts of me: my feminism and my Judaism. My tefillin are the perfect example of this paradox, symbolizing the conflict between traditional Jewish practice and feminist belief. Yet the choice to immerse myself in this Jewish practice shows that my tefillin are not just feminist: they are an attempt to connect myself to my Jewish roots. Therefore, whenever I intertwine myself with my tefillin, figuratively and with its physical straps, with messy hair and Michelin Man arms, they remind me of my struggle with both Judaism and feminism, as well as my search for connection between the two different pieces of my identity.

*Hannah Landau, age 16 at time of publication (2019)*

