**Legal-Ease**  
**By Ari Z. Zivotofsky**

**What’s the Truth about...**

**Rashi’s Daughters?**

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**MISCONCEPTION:** Rashi’s daughters wore tefillin.

**FACT:** There is no evidence that Rashi’s daughters wore tefillin.

**BACKGROUND:** Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, known colloquially as “Rashi,” is the commentator par excellence on both the Torah and Talmud. Born in Troyes in northern France in 4801 (1040 CE), he descended on both sides from influential families. He studied in Worms, Germany, under some of the leading rabbinic authorities of his time and established a yeshivah in Troyes that was destined to become one of the principal disseminators of Ashkenazic tradition. In the wake of the destruction of the German Jewish centers by the Crusaders, Rashi established France as the Torah capital of Ashkenazic Jewry. He died in Troyes in 4865 (1105 CE).

Rashi had four daughters and no sons. The two daughters about whom some information is known are Miriam and Yocheved. Both of them married great Torah scholars and bore and raised the undisputed leaders of Ashkenazic Jewry. Yocheved married Rabbi Meir ben Shmuel, one of Rashi’s star pupils, and they had four famous sons: Yitzchak (“Rivam”), Shmuel (“Rashbam”), Shlomo the grammarian, and the youngest and most famous, Yaakov (“Rabbeinu Tam”). Miriam married Yehudah ben Nathan (“Rivan”) who finished Rashi’s commentary to *Makkot*. Rashi appears to have had another daughter, Rachel, and a fourth daughter who died young.

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While there is no evidence that any of Rashi’s daughters wore tefillin, this myth persists and is found in various printed sources. In her book, *Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey Toward Traditional Rabbinic Ordination*, Dr. Haviva Ner-David cites Rashi’s daughters’ “tradition” of wearing tefillin as setting a precedent. Similarly, an article that appeared in the *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* mentions that Rashi’s daughters wore tefillin.

The halachah makes it clear that women are exempt from wearing tefillin (*Mishnah Berachot* 3:3; *Kidushin* 33b-34a; *SA, OC* 38:3). Whether women are allowed to don tefillin is the subject of great debate. The Rema (in *OC* 38:3) rules that it should be discouraged, and the Gra (comments to *OC* 38:3) contends that women are prohibited from wearing them.

Ironically, some scholars argue that during the early medieval period there was actually a general laxity among men or even outright neglect of the mitzvah of donning tefillin. Rabbi Moshe Couchi, in the introduction to *Halachot Gedolot*, states that he preached in France about the importance of putting on tefillin daily and that, as a result, people were more conscientious about putting on tefillin. In a footnote (2), she concludes: “There is no proof for the popular legend that Rashi’s daughters wore tefillin. However, it is interesting to speculate on why this association arose; it probably has to do with the fact that Rashi’s daughters were known to be exceptional in that they were educated.”

A similar baseless claim developed around the first wife of the Ohr HaChaim. She was the daughter of a famous rabbi, and some claim that she wore tallit and tefillin. There is no historical evidence of that.

The Talmud reports that Michal bat King Shaul, wife of King David, wore tefillin, though there are conflicting reports in the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi about how her contemporaries viewed this. There is documentation indicating that Hannah Rachel Webersmacher, the famed “Maiden of Ludmir,” who was a nineteenth-century Polish Chassidic leader, wore tefillin.

If women are indeed forbidden to wear tefillin, how could Michal bat...
Shaul wear tefillin? The Kaf HaChaim (OC 38:9) quotes a creative suggestion by the Yafe l’lev. He suggests that Michal knew that she possessed a reincarnated “male soul.” He proposes that this also explains her barrenness.

Regarding Rashi’s daughters, one can argue that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. However because the notion of Rashi’s daughters wearing tefillin appears only in late twentieth-century writings, and does not seem to appear anywhere before that, this would indicate that it is, in fact, a myth.

Notes
2. (Boston, 2000), 2.
5. A remarkable source is Rabbi Avigdor Tzarfati, one of the ba’alei Tosafot, in his Sefer Perushim Upesakim al haTorah leRabbeinu Avigdor Tzarfati, where he states that some of the righteous women in his time had the practice of putting on tefillin and reciting a berachah. I thank noted Israeli historian and Rashi expert Professor Avraham Grossman of Hebrew University for this source. Professor Grossman also stated in a personal e-mail that the legend about Rashi’s daughters wearing tefillin has no historical basis.
6. “Wrapped Attention: May Women Wear Tefillin?” in Jewish Legal Writings by Women, edited by Micah D. Halpern and Chana Safrai (Jerusalem, 1998), 75-118. A recent book by Rabbi Aharon Feldman (The Eye of the Storm: A Calm View of Raging Issues [Jerusalem, 2009]), using Berger’s article as a springboard, criticizes the suggestion that women may wear tefillin. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, in reviewing the book (Jewish Action, [spring 2010], 18-21), while not advocating women wear tefillin, took exception with Rabbi Feldman’s tone and methodology and presented a variety of positions on the topic. Ner-David in her book also reviews much of the literature regarding women wearing tefillin but gives scant weight to those who prohibit it. For an interesting modern source that discusses women and tefillin, see Ohr Sameach, Hilchot Talmud Torah, near the end of the long commentary to 1:2.
7. Rabbi Aryeh Frimer, a recognized expert on women’s halachic issues, reports having thoroughly studied the subject and finding no source for this myth. Professor David Golinkin (“May Women wear Tefillin?,” Conservative Judaism [Fall 1997]: 3-18) wrote, “There is a widespread story that Rashi’s daughters wore tefillin, but I have been unable to find any written proof of this assertion.” Cf Idem, “Ha’im Mutar Lenashim Lehanahach Tefillin? Asufot 11 (5758): 183-196.
8. Eruvin 96a-b; Yerushalmi, Berachot 2:3 and Eruvin 10:1; see Tosafot, Rosh Hashanah 33a, sv. haRebbi.