

I have a confession to make.

One of my weaknesses is that I am both 'woke' and an overthinking person who wears one's heart on my sleeve.

People have tried to beat it out of me – physically, mentally, emotionally, and even through procedural actions, but try as they may, and try as I do, there comes a point when you have to say, "It's time to own this in my life, and stop letting it be a weakness, but part of who I am."

I reflected on this, and I think the beginning, I AM, is the key to being authentic to my calling. Some may see it as my weakness; others laud it as a good thing. Living in such a complicated space is sometimes exhausting and heartbreaking. Maybe I need to tie my heart to my sleeve lest it fall on the ground and wither.

That expression, 'wearing one heart on one's sleeve', is an interesting idiom. Many think it comes from the Crusades, when knights, conscious of their loved ones back home, would tie a heart (and sometimes a key, but that is a rather sordid story, best left for adult hours) to their left arm whilst away in Jerusalem. It's a nice story, but I think the Jerusalem bit has more legs than the broken hearts on the wrist.

As mentioned before, it would make more sense to look at the Jewish people's custom of tying God's words to their wrists. Known in English, from the Greek, a phylactery, or as it is known in Hebrew, the tefillin.

1. Shel Yad (טַלְטֻלָּה): This is the tefillin worn on the arm. It consists of a black leather box containing passages from the Torah. It is bound to the weaker arm, typically the left arm for right-handed individuals and the right arm for left-handed individuals.

So, the leather binding is meant to be just the hand and wrist. Some people, more wealthy and of more importance, a notion often decided by themselves, would have elaborate decorations on theirs and proudly wear them to the Temple, as the rules of prayer would require it. The Shel Yad deliberately pointed to the heart. The text it contained was part of the Creed of the Hebrew people, the Shema.

The tefillin contained the letter ק (Kaf) - Representing the verse from Deuteronomy 6:8: "And you shall bind these words as a sign upon your hands."

שְׁמָעָהּ יִיִסְרָאֵל אֲדֹנָי יְהוֹהֵנוּ אֲדֹנָי יְהוּאֵד:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is God: the Lord is One. Jesus adds: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. The tefillin or phylactery on the turban contained two other letters.

- ש (Shin) - Representing the verse from Exodus 13:9: "And it shall be a sign unto you upon your hand and for a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth."
- ד (Dalet) - Representing the verse from Exodus 13:16: "And it shall be for a token upon your hand and for frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt."

These Hebrew letters and verses are inscribed on parchment scrolls in the tefillin boxes. The tefillin is worn carefully to specific rituals and prayers during the morning service, symbolising a connection to the commandments and God's presence.

So, the right hand, the dominant, is how we gain prosperity, often misrepresented by interpreting that as wealth and power. It is the chief for most people. Some of us even remember the tales of teachers, particularly nuns, beating the left-handed, dominated people to stop them from using their weaker hands. Oddly, as science attests, the left side is controlled by the right side, and if God empowers the left to be more concerned with things, I'm happy to think that maybe it is a

good side to be on. The left brain controls our right side. Perhaps that is the conscious call from God that prosperity is good, but the marginalised need our response to be positive.

I like the idea of wearing what is required of the heart on the sleeve. If the word of God is to be bound to our hands, strengthening what most people struggle with, then I'm more than happy to have this represent my relationship with God. To love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength is at the heart of the teaching of the Great I AM. The Great I AM is in whose image we were reminded of last week we are made.

I visited the Roman Baths in Bath during my time away. Part of the display was to project both images and holograms into the various areas of the baths so that you could understand what happened there. Despite the modern projections, there was a shallowness to these images, and you could see through them. It was rather ghostly but also instead informing. The strengths of the past were being played out before you.

Sometimes, we will see our duty before God, especially following in the Way of his Son, Jesus our Lord, that transparency is good and evil. It does allow people to see us, but also through us. We are called to be people of love whose image illuminates the world and how we are to interact with others. The image of the Great I AM is perceived within us. Sometimes, that transparency sheds an appearance of hollowness. Such hollowness was at the centre of Jesus' interaction with the Sadducees.

Having evaded the trap of the Pharisees, they tried to entrap him with a discussion of the Ten Commandments. Which one was the greatest? Jesus' answer was masterful. By quoting back to them the Shema and adding, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself", it was a call to be transparent in everything they did. If you look at the first four commandments, it is summed up as "Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength." The following six deal with our interactions with our neighbours. On these, said Jesus, hang all the prophets' laws and teachings.

Paul, in his writing to the community of Thessaloniki, continues his teaching on the understanding of call. He writes in 1 Thess 2.3-7,

2:3 For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the Gospel, even so, we speak not to please mortals but to please God, who tests our hearts. As you know, and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you like a nurse tenderly caring for her children.

The sense of calling into the family of Jesus is not to seek the vanity and prosperity of mammon or puffed-up self-importance but rather to please God, who tests our hearts. The rule of the heart, the pastoral caring of the poor, the widowed, the orphan and the marginalised is at the heart of the Gospel. That is what my left hand reminds me of as I bind unto myself the teaching of what the Lord requires.

I am less than perfect. It is costly. Through the sacrament of the Church, I am fed the transforming food that reminds me that sometimes, witnessing is expensive. It is not costly to the community at large but to the individual.

YOU, says the great I AM, YOU are to do this. Bind it to your heart. Wear it on your sleeve. And think about being WOKE from time to time. It is not a weakness that the dominant right seeks to destroy and undermine; it is the core of the Gospel. It is at the centre of all Jesus' teachings. And this one whom we call LORD, Jesus, also demands it of us.

What does the Lord require? Justice, mercy, and a humble, woke journey with the great I AM.