



Kedushas Tefillin

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The point of this publication is to help create an awareness regarding the sanctity of tefillin.

Mitzvas Tefillin: Questions and Answers

by: Rabbi Doniel Neustadt Shlit"a

According to the Talmud,¹ Avraham's firm refusal to share in the spoils of war with the King of Sodom, and his proud, righteous proclamation that Hashem alone is his benefactor, had far-reaching results. In the merit of his statement, *If so much as a thread to a shoe strap*, Hashem rewarded his descendants with the mitzvah of *retzuah shel tefillin* (tefillin straps). The term "*retzuah shel tefillin*" signifies that aside from the tefillin themselves, there is a special significance to the *retzuos*, the straps, of the tefillin. Some relevant information:

Question: What is the correct length for the *retzuos*?

Discussion: The minimum length of the strap of the *tefillin shel yad* must be at least long enough to encircle one's upper arm, form the *kesher* and tighten it, extend downwards to the middle finger and encircle it three times. It is preferable and customary, however, to have a *retzuah* long enough so that it can be wrapped around the arm seven times.²

The *retzuah* for the *tefillin shel rosh* must be at least long enough to encircle one's head with an additional two *tefachim* [approximately 7-8 inches] on each side.³ It is preferable and customary to have longer *retzuos*, extending to the midsection of the body, with the right one longer than the left one.⁴

Question: How wide must the *retzuos* be?

Discussion: While contemporary *retzuos* are usually fifteen

millimeters wide, the minimum width of the *retzuah* is eleven⁵ millimeters. Under extenuating circumstances, one may put on *tefillin* (and recite the blessings) even if the *retzuah* is only nine millimeters wide.⁶ It is important to be aware that from wear and tear, a *retzuah* will frequently narrow at the point where it is tightened and fall short of the required width.⁷

Question: How black must be the *retzuos* be?

Discussion: The outside⁸ of the *retzuos* (i.e., the side that faces up, away from the skin) must be painted black, "black as a raven," *l'chatchilah*.⁹ To obtain this intense shade of black, the *retzuos* must be blackened, allowed to dry, and blackened a second and third time. *B'diavad*, the *retzuos* are kosher as long as they can be considered black. Even if they appear to be closer to dark blue or gray, they are still kosher.¹⁰

When the *retzuos* age and the blackening peels off, they should be blackened again. [Special care must be taken at the point of tightening, since frequently, the paint peels off just at that spot.¹¹] *L'chatchilah*, the *retzuos* should be reblackened so that not even a speck of white appears. But the *retzuos* are still kosher as long as they appear black to the naked eye,¹² even though they have

⁵ According to the measurements of Chazon Ish. According to the measurements of Rav A.C. Naeh, the *l'chatchilah* minimum is 10 millimeters; See *Shiurei Torah* 3:37. If the *retzuah* shrinks to less than 9 millimeters wide and no other tefillin are available, a rav should be consulted.

⁶ *O.C.* 27:11 and *Mishnah Berurah* 42, 44; *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 27:22; *Chazon Ish*, *O.C.* 4:1; *Shiurei Torah* 3:37.

⁷ *Mishnah Berurah* 27:42.

⁸ The inside of the *retzuos* (the side that faced down and towards the skin), including the edges, need not be painted at all; *Mishnah Berurah* 33:21. See *Shevet ha-Levi* 9:16 for a full discussion.

⁹ *Mishnah Berurah* 33:19.

¹⁰ *Beur Halachah* 33:3, s.v. *ha-retzuos*. See *Halichos Yisrael* 1:16, quoting Rav Y.Z. Gustman.

¹¹ *Mishnah Berurah* 33:19.

¹² *Salmas Chayim* 3:23; *Teshuvos Maharshag* 1:7; *Halichos Shelomo* 1:4-28; *Teshuvos v'Hanhagos* 2:22; *Yashiv Moshe* pg. 87, quoting Rav S. Vosner.

¹ *Chulin* 89a.

² *O.C.* 27:8; *Mishnah Berurah* 27:44.

³ *Mishnah Berurah* 27:44.

⁴ *Mishnah Berurah* 27:41.

tiny white flecks or cracks, especially if the white spots are on the part of the *retzuos* which are longer than the minimum length and width described earlier.¹³

Question: May the *retzuos* be blackened by a woman or a minor?

Discussion: The blackening must be done *l'shem mitzvas tefillin*.¹⁴ One who forgot to state explicitly or to bear in mind that he is blackening them *lishmah*, must repaint the *retzuos* with the proper concentration.¹⁵ A woman may blacken the *retzuos*. A minor may do so only if an adult is supervising him while instructing him to blacken them *l'shem mitzvas tefillin*.¹⁶ [The *retzuos* may be blackened at night.¹⁷]

Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel ***Mir Rosh Yeshiva and Starbucks***

The following story was told over at an awards ceremony for Howard Schultz, chairman and chief global strategist of the famed coffee company, Starbucks Corp. Schultz received the Botwinick Prize in Business Ethics from Columbia Business School in 2000, and during his acceptance speech, he related a fascinating insight into how he became a better person.

“When I was in Israel,” Schultz related, “I went to Meah Shearim, the ultra-Orthodox enclave within Jerusalem. Along with a group of businessmen I was with, I had the opportunity to meet with the head of the Mir Yeshiva, Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel. I had never heard of him before and didn’t know anything about him. We were ushered into his study and waited for close to fifteen minutes before the Rabbi came in. What we did not know was that Rabbi Finkel was severely afflicted with Parkinson’s disease. He sat down at the head of the table, and immediately we looked away. We didn’t want to embarrass him. Suddenly, the

Rabbi banged on the table and said, ‘Gentlemen, look at me, and look at me right now!’

“His speech affliction was worse than his shaking. It was really hard to listen and look at him at the same time. He said, ‘I have only a few minutes for you because I know you’re all busy American businessmen!’ You know, just a little dig there.

“Then he asked, ‘Can anyone tell me what the lesson of the Holocaust is?’ He called on one guy - it was like being called on in the fifth grade - and not knowing the answer. The guy said something benign like, ‘We will never forget?’ “The Rabbi completely dismissed him. Rabbi Finkel was looking around the table to call on someone else. We were all sort of under the table, looking away, hoping he would not call on any one of us. Personally, I was sweating. He called on another guy, who I thought had such a fantastic answer. ‘We will never, ever again be a victim or bystander.’ “But the Rabbi said, ‘You guys just don’t get it. Okay, let me tell you the essence of the human spirit. As you know, during the Holocaust, the people were transported in the worst most inhumane ways imaginable. The people thought they were going to a work camp but we know they were sent to concentration camps. After hours and days in this horrific corral with no light, no bathroom and extreme cold, they arrived at the camps. The doors were swung wide open, and they were blinded by the light. Men and women were separated, mothers from daughters, fathers from sons. Eventually, they were sent to the barracks. “As they went into the sleeping area, only one person was given a blanket for every six. The person who received the blanket had to decide before going to sleep, ‘Am I going to push the blanket to the five other people who did not get one, or am I going to pull it towards myself to stay warm?’ These are the types of questions they asked themselves. “Rabbi Finkel paused for a moment. Then he said, ‘Gentlemen, it was during this defining moment that we learned the power of the human spirit, because we pushed the blanket to five others. That is the lesson of the Holocaust!’ “With that, he stood up and said, ‘Take your blanket. Take it back to America - and push it to five other people!’”

There is a follow-up to this story. Apparently Mr. Schultz later returned to Israel and visited Rabbi Nosson Tzvi again. This time, he pulled out a blank check, signed it and told Rabbi Finkel to fill it out for whatever he wants. Rabbi Nosson Tzvi asked him, “I can fill out this check for whatever I want?” Mr. Schultz answered in the affirmative.

¹³ Rav M. Feinstein was asked: How much whiteness on the *tefillin* straps renders them invalid? He is quoted (*Guide to Practical Halachah*, vol. 1, pg. 158) as answering: “For what is needed for the *shiuir*, we are stringent—even if a tiny drop is not black, the area must be repainted. Beyond that, the amount does not matter unless it is really noticeable.” See also *Zichron Eliyahu* (based on the rulings of Rav Y.S. Elyashiv) 20:7.

¹⁴ *L'chatchilah*, the *l'shem mitzvas tefillin* must be stated aloud; see *Mishnah Berurah* 11:4; 32:24.

¹⁵ *Beur Halachah* 33:4, s.v. *pasul*.

¹⁶ *Mishnah Berurah* 33:23.

¹⁷ Rav Y.S. Elyashiv and Rav C.P. Scheinberg, quoted in *Mevakshi Torah*, vol. 4, pg. 415.

[Bear in mind that the monthly budget for the Mir Yeshiva is several hundred thousand dollars!!] Rabbi Nosson Tzvi picked up his pen and wrote out the check for \$1400. Then, he handed the check to Howard Schultz, and told him to take it across the street to the scribe (Sofer), use it to buy a pair of Tefillin, and promise to put it on every day. His Yeshiva was millions of dollars in debt, and Rabbi Nosson Tzvi worked very hard to raise money for the Yeshiva, but he thought about his fellow Jew first.

The Power of Tefillin

by: Hakhel

Rabban Gamliel Rabinovich, Shlita notes that every morning, before putting on his Tefillin, he reminds himself that unlike the Tzitz--one of the Eight Garments of the Kohen Gadol which had Hashem's Name on it one time (in the words Kodesh LaShem), one's Tefillin has the Name of Hashem in it 42 times. This is a great source of inspiration and appreciation when donning Tefillin.

The Bi'ur Halacha in Hilchos Tefillin adds that when we tie the knot on our arm every morning--we are tying the "Kesher HaYichud VeHaKedusha--the knot which declares Hashem's Oneness and Mastery, and the knot of Holiness."

A Rav once saw his Mispalet with a tired and distracted face as he was about to don his Tefillin. He turned to him and said--in the *Megillah*, what you are about to do is referred to as "Yekar"--something very honored, and very precious. You should be smiling from ear to ear that you have an opportunity now to wear not any crown jewels--but Hashem's crown jewels!

Giving Away his Tefillin

by: R' Tzvi Akiva Fleisher

"V'es kol chelbo yorim mi'menu" - A destitute person came to the Imrei Emes, lamenting his condition, saying that he did not even have a pair of tefillin to his name. The Imrei Emes offered him a pair of tefillin, but advising him that they were his inheritance from the Sfas Emes. The fellow was in such awe of the Sfas Emes that he refused to wear them and another pair was found to give to him. A household member asked the Imrei Emes why he was

willing to part with this treasure. He answered that by giving the tefillin to a poor man he would be doing a mitzvah. The Torah requires of us to give the fattest choicest items for Hashem.

Worry for Holy Objects

by: Meoros HaDaf HaYomi

The author of Chazon Nachum zt"l, the brother of the Tchebiner Gaon zt"l, printed his sefer two weeks before the start of the Second World War. Before the books were bound, the Nazis ym"sh invaded Poland and he wanted to flee the country. At the border, the Nazis removed his tefillin from their covers and threw them on the ground. He immediately lifted them fervently and kissed them but the Nazis again threw them down. He fainted from anguish and passed away (see his biography in the preface to his book).

Betzilo Chimadti recounts that when the Tchebiner Gaon was asked about his brother's opinion, that tefillin should not be brought to a person ill with a contagious disease lest the hospital staff burn them, he mentioned the above event and said that once we comprehend his intense trepidation for tefillin, we can well understand why he ruled so.

"It is worn on the head opposite the mind, in order that my soul, senses and strengths be committed to the service of Hashem"

by: R' Sender Gruen

The ר' אליעזר בן יעקב in the name of מנחות מ"ג: in גמרא says that someone who is wearing תפילין and ציצית and has מזוזות on his doorways is fully protected against doing עבירות. This is derived from a פסוק in תהלים which says that the person will actually be assisted with this by מלאך.

The מהרש"א explains that although every mitzvah creates a מלאך, this one creates one that resembles the characteristics of this mitzvah. Just as this mitzvah surrounds the wearer, so too the מלאך it creates surrounds the wearer to protect them from עבירות.

When מחלל שבת was in the מדבר someone was כלל ישראל. The תנא דבי אליהו says that Hashem Himself explained to משה רבינו that this happened because on שבת he did not have his תפילין to strengthen his resistance.

In מורה נבוכים the רמב"ם writes that the intention of this מצוה is so that we should remember to believe in Hashem, fear and love Him, and keep His commandments.

Join the Kedushas Tefillin Program!

WHO IS THIS PROGRAM FOR?

Any boy who has a *ratzon* to wear his *tefillin* without talking.

HOW DO I JOIN?

Contact our Gabbai, Eli Jaffa, @ 216-385-4869, or send us an email @ kedushastefillin@gmail.com.

WHAT ARE THE RULES?

See below.

WHAT DO I GET?

A tremendous reward for *davening* properly, and for being careful in the fulfillment of this *mitzvah*. For the "*she'lo lishma*" part, see below.

HOW DO I KEEP TRACK?

After you join, you will receive a monthly card.

WHEN CAN I START?

As soon as you make the commitment.

Hatzlachah!!

Kedushas Tefillin Rules

1. You should be *davening* with a *minyan*.
2. You should be wearing your *tefillin* from at least "*Boruch she'amar*" until after "*Aleinu*."
3. **There is no talking (including "mouthing") with your *tefillin* on.**
4. Even if you (*mistakenly*) talk, you will try not to continue (*during that Shacharis*).
5. The month begins on *Rosh Chodesh* (*second day, when applicable*).
6. You cannot miss-out more than four times during a month.
7. If you have a perfect month, or only miss once - you will receive the following: a set of old coins (which includes: 2 pennies from the 50's; 2 from the 40's; 2 from the 30's), plus you will be entered into **three** raffles for sets of *seforim*.

8. If you miss twice or three times, you will still receive the set of old coins, and you will be entered into **two** raffles for sets of *seforim*.
9. When you have completed your third month, the set of coins will begin to include the following: Pennies from the 20's; 10's; 1900's; 1890's; 1880's and even earlier; nickels from the turn of the century; foreign coins, plus more.
10. Any boy that hands in 12 cards (*and did not win any of the monthly raffles*) will receive a *sefer*.

After One Year.....

1. We have almost 100 bochurim (and several married men as well) from all over America (Cleveland, Monsey, Chicago, Lakewood, Brooklyn, Los Angeles and more) participating in this program.
2. We have given out 18 sets of *seforim* to our monthly raffle winners.
3. There have been over 250 months of "non-talking" while these boys have been wearing their *tefillin*.
4. We have sent out close to 2,500 old American coins - including 1943 steel pennies, Indian-head pennies from the turn of the Century, wheat pennies, Buffalo nickels, coins from the 1870s, and much more.
5. We have given out hundreds of foreign coins - including coins from Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Korea, Italy, China, Peru, Argentina, Belgium, England, Somalia, France, New Zealand, Singapore, the Philippines, South Africa, and many more.
6. We would like to give out more. Please join and refer friends. **[There will be a special raffle for any boy who "signs-up" five or more boys during the month of Sivan; a sefer, plus ten coins - dated between 1900 and 1920.]**

If you would like your school or class to join this project, please contact Rabbi Adler @ 216-235-4330, or email us @ kedushastefillin@gmail.com.