



FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

RAV DANIEL MANN



Tefillin Prepared by Children under Bar Mitzva

Question: Several years ago, when I was 11, my (Orthodox) *shul* brought in a person who makes *tefillin batim* (boxes) and guided several friends and me to more or less make our own *tefillin*. Someone questioned me as to whether the *tefillin* are kosher because I was not yet bar mitzva. I would rather not ask my rabbi, who brought him in. Are my *tefillin* kosher?

Answer: The *gemara* (Gittin 45b) derives from the proximity of the commandments to write Torah texts (*mezuzah*) and to attach them (*tefillin*) to the arm (Devarim 11:18-20) that only one who is obligated to and fulfills the *mitzva* of *tefillin* can write them. The Rambam (Tefillin 3:16) extends this rule to making *batim*, as does the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 39:2). Children are

not obligated in *tefillin* on the level of Torah law, and thus the *tefillin* they make before bar mitzva may not be used after they are fully obligated. *Poskim* discuss which actions suffice with adult coaching (*gadol omed al gabav*) to provide proper intent (*lishma*) and which a *katan* cannot do at all (see Bi'ur Halacha ad loc.).

Therefore, if a *tefillin*-making workshop leader knows how to do his job properly, he can involve children significantly and still have an adult do the halachically required parts of the process. A few years ago, we at Eretz Hemdah were among those who approved and wrote specific guidelines for such a person. If you were led by him, we are fully confident your *tefillin* were made kosher. Since *tefillin* need to remain kosher, we remind you to not overly expose them to heat and avoid dampness and pressure. You should also periodically ascertain that it remains in good repair (e.g., the surfaces remain straight).

Since you did not tell us who led your workshop or who your rabbi is/was, on a certain level, we cannot fully attest your *tefillin's* *kashrut*. But we urge people to follow an important rule – a member of a respectable Orthodox community should trust his rabbi's judgment and communal standards. If one cannot do that, he has major problems in various areas. *Baruch Hashem*, rabbis in the United States have

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The Orthodox Union - via its website - fields questions of all types in areas of kashrut, Jewish law and values. Some of them are answered by Eretz Hemdah, the Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, headed by Rav Yosef Carmel and Rav Moshe Ehrenreich, founded by HaRav Shaul Yisraeli zt"l, to prepare rabbanim and dayanim to serve the National Religious community in Israel and abroad. Ask the Rabbi is a joint venture of the OU, Yerushalayim Network, Eretz Hemdah... and OU Israel's Torah Tidbits.



earned their communities' trust.

Now a word to our readers – the tefillin owner who asked is not among them.

The operation which Eretz Hemdah approved (information can be given to individuals who approach us) teaches pre-bar mitzva boys many *halachot* they would otherwise not learn or remember and has developed an inspiring curriculum. He correctly teaches that *ketanim* may not do the most critical steps themselves. This young man might have forgotten that over the years, or perhaps the person who led his workshop did not make it as clear as he might have. The rationale of having the children “make the *tefillin* themselves,” when that is not exactly the case, is that the involvement creates a greater connection to this important *mitzva*. In some cases, this can make the difference between their being life-time *tefillin* wearers or not. One can argue that as long as the *tefillin* are kosher, the kids don't need to know that is only because they were helped. That is a tenable approach, but one we would not advocate under normal circumstances.

Batim made in such workshops could not be *gassot* (from a large animal, which requires serious equipment), but *dakkot* (hopefully, not *peshutot*). We will skip the intricacies, but *gassot* have advantages, especially their excellent longevity in

good, kosher condition without needing renovation or replacement. The best (and most expensive) *tefillin* on the market are *gassot*. The *tefillin* produced in the operation we approved are higher quality than “inexpensive” ones, but are not of the highest “quality” echelon. A rabbi or educator who would bring in such a workshop must weigh the pluses and minuses and determine (and/or discuss with parents) what is best for **his** bar mitzva boys. Having two pairs or donating the one he made to a good cause might be a nice option for those who can afford it, as the opportunity is educationally powerful even for those who will anyway be life-long *tefillin* wearers. ■

Eretz Hemdah has begun a participatory Zoom class - "Behind the Scenes with the Vebbe Rebbe" - an analytical look at the sources, methodology, and considerations behind our rulings, with Rav Daniel Mann. Contact info@eretzhemdah.org to join while places are open.

Having a dispute?



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