Preface Tefillin Housings (*Battim*)

The tefillin scrolls are housed in containers (called *battim*) made from the skins of kosher animals. The container consists of three sections: a) the cube into which the scrolls are inserted – *ketzitza*; b) the platform surrounding the bottom of the *ketzitza* where it is sewn together – *titura*; and c) the tunnel through which the tefillin strap is run – *ma'abarta*. (Illustration №28)

The *bayit* of *tefillin shel yad* consists of a single compartment, and the scroll on which the four passages are written is rolled up and inserted into that compartment. (Illustration №29) **The *bayit* of *tefillin shel rosh*** consists of four separate compartments. The four passages are written on four separate pieces of parchment, and each one is inserted into one of the four compartments. (Illustration №30) Although the *bayit* appears at first glance to be a single cube, upon closer examination it becomes clear that the cube consists of four rectangular parts, with three grooves marking where they meet. See below in halakha 154 for details about these grooves.

The *titura* is the section below the ''cube'' surrounding it on all four sides. The leather is bent over so that it also covers the bottom of the *bayit* , and therefore there is an upper section of *titura* and a lower section. Actually, the Talmud refers only to the lower section as *titura*. The word *titura* means ''bridge,'' and the lower section bridges the open compartments and protects their contents. (Illustration №31)

In most tefillin *battim*, an extra square leather plate is placed between the two sections of the *titura* to add to its total height. See below in halakha 132.

The *ma'abarta* is an extension of the *titura* on the back of the *bayit*, formed by bending the *titura* leather. It forms a tunnel through which the tefillin strap is run. The word *ma'abarta* means passageway, and it is called this since it is a passageway for the tefillin strap. (Illustration №32)

Since the *titura* must have a perfect square shape, a bit of the *ma'abarta* is cut away on either end to identify where the *titura* ends and the *ma'abarta* begins. (Illustration №32a) In the *tefillin shel yad*, a larger groove is cut away on the right side to make room for the knot of the tefillin strap. (Illustration

№ 32b) If the tefillin is made for a left-handed person, the larger groove is cut on the left side. See below in halakha 166.

The letter *shin* is formed on the right side and the left side of the *tefillin shel rosh*. On the right side, a regular *shin* with three ''heads'' is displayed, but on the left side, a special *shin* with four ''heads'' is displayed. (Illustration № 33) Different communities have varied customs regarding the exact shape of the *shin*. See below in halakha 158.

Twelve stitches shut the *titura* into place onto the *bayit*. For this purpose, twelve holes are drilled through the *titura*, and grooves are cut from one hole to the next so that the stitches follow perfectly straight lines and form perfect squares, both on top of the *titura* and on the bottom. (Illustration № 34) According to the halakha, the stitches must form a perfect square, the *titura* must be shaped into a perfect square, and the *ketzita* must be shaped into a perfect square. See below in halakhot 133, 143, and 167.

דיני בתי התפילין

דיני עור הבתים

קכו. עור בתי התפילין צריך להיות מעור בהמה חיה ועוף טהורים, אפילו מנבלה או טרפה שלהם [ש"ע סעיף לז], דכתיב (שמות יג, ט), "למען תהיה תורת ה' בפיך", ודרשו חכמים (שבת כח ע"ב) מן המותר בפיך. וכיון דאות שי"ן שהוא מרמז על שם שדי נקמט בעור התפילין, הרי שהוא בכלל "תורת ה'". ואין

Tefillin Housings (*Battim*)

The Leather Used to Make the *Battim*

Leather of kosher animals

126) The leather used to make the *battim* of tefillin must be that made from the skin of a kosher animal,[106] since the Torah states (*Shemot* 13:9): "לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת ה' בְּפִיךָ – so that God's Torah will be in your mouth," teaching that the tefillin must be made of an animal that we may place in our mouths. It can be the skin of a

106. Fish skin

The *Darkhe Moshe* ruled that fish skin may not be used to make tefillin *battim*. The *Mishna Berura* (*Bi'ur Halakha* 32:37), however, pointed out that it appears from Rambam that fish skin may be used for this purpose. Rambam ruled that fish skin may not be used for the parchment of tefillin scrolls, since it is not possible to tan it perfectly to rid it of its fishy odor. Regarding tefillin *battim*, Rambam ruled that it is not necessary to tan the leather at all, and if so even leather that has the animal's odor can be used for *battim*. Fish skin, therefore, is no different than the skin of any other kosher animal.

Despite this argument, it is clear that according to the *Rishonim* cited above in the footnote to halakha 42 that fish skin may not be used for tefillin *battim*.

Giraffe skin

The responsa *Teshuvot Vehanhagot* (Vol. V, #11) ruled that technically it is possible to make kosher tefillin *battim* with the leather of a giraffe's skin. A giraffe has the two identifying signs of a kosher mammal – it chews its cud and it has split hooves. Many *Poskim* ruled that we may not eat giraffe meat since there is no known tradition of Jewish communities who treated it as a kosher beast. In practice, however, one should not indulge in this novelty for one's tefillin, either. Everyone should continue to use tefillin made from the materials our ancestors have used for thousands of years.

The added leather plate between the *ketzitza* and *titura*

The *Mishna Berura* (*Bi'ur Halakha* 32:37) cited the *Lishkat Hasofer* testifying that it is common to add a leather plate between the *ketzitza* and the *titura*, and he complained that this added piece is not necessarily leather that was tanned for the sake of the sanctity of tefillin, nor must it be the leather of a kosher animal. Rather, any scrap of leather found in a garbage heap or cut from an old pair of shoes is used. This practice is incorrect, the *Mishna Berura* asserted, for this piece must be made from the skin of a kosher animal since it becomes an integral part of the tefillin.

The *Mishna Berura* offered some defense for this practice, however, explaining that although this piece might be glued to the *bayit*, it is not part of the *ketzitza* or of the *titura*. Therefore, although it is wrong for a scribe to use nonkosher leather for this piece, if the tefillin have already been assembled there is a basis to deem them kosher for use. This piece of leather, he maintained, is no worse than the glue used to attach the pieces of the *ketzitza* together, and the *Peri Megadim* ruled that even if the glue comes from a nonkosher source the tefillin are kosher.

חילוק בין תפילין של ראש לתפילין של יד. [משנ"ב ס"ק קסו, וראה ביאור הלכה ד"ה טהורים]. וכן הוא הדין לגבי עור התיתורא והמעברתא (שבתחתית התפילין) שיהיו "מן המותר בפיך", כיון שהם מחוברים ותפורים בבתים. (תמונה ל"ה) [משנ"ב ס"ק קסח]

דין עור רצועות התפילין שיהיה "מן המותר בפיך", יתבאר לקמן בסימן ל"ג.

קכז. תפילין שהונח על התיתורא מבפנים חומר הנקרא ג'לאטין שנעשה מעצמות בהמות טמאות, כדי להשקיף ולהצליל את עור התיתורא, ויהיה ניכר מבחוץ שהפרשיות מונחות בבתים (תמונה ל"ו). יש להכשיר התפילין הללו, ואין לחוש בהם משום "מן המותר בפיך". [יבי"א ח"א סי' א]

קכח. עור הבתים רשאי לעשותם מקלף, או מעור שליל. [ש"ע שם].

domesticated beast, a wild beast (e.g., deer), or the skin of a kosher bird. Even if the animal was not slaughtered properly, or if it is *terefa* because of a fatal blemish, its skin can be used for tefillin.

This applies both to the *tefillin shel yad* and the *tefillin shel rosh*, and it includes the leather used for the *titura* and the *ma'abarta*, since they are permanently attached to the *ketzitza*. (Illustration №35) See below in *Siman* 33 for the rules regarding the leather used for tefillin straps.

Day 31

Gelatin additives

127) It was once common to smear gelatin on the bottom *titura* to make it transparent. In this way, the rolled up scrolls inside are visible through the *titura*. (Illustration №36) Although gelatin is often made from the bones of nonkosher beasts, the tefillin are kosher.[107]

Fetal vs full-grown animals

128) Tefillin *battim* may be made from parchment or from the skin of a fetal animal. It is preferable, however, to use the leather of a large domestic mammal, specifically the skin of its neck and throat. This is the common

Nevertheless, the *Mishna Berura* did not arrive at a definite conclusion.

Maran the Rishon Letziyon (responsa *Yabia Omer* Vol. I, #1:12) found reasonable grounds to rule that the tefillin are kosher. The purpose of the added leather plate is to give the tefillin a symmetrical appearance, and the responsa *Noda Bihuda* and *Teshuva Me'ahava* both ruled that anything added to tefillin simply to improve its appearance may be the product of a nonkosher animal.

One might argue that the added plate serves an important purpose besides improving the tefillin's appearance. Without the added plate, the four compartments of the *tefillin shel rosh* are more likely to separate from one another, and the added plate holds them in place. If so, the plate is equal to the glue used in the making of the *bayit*, just as the *Mishna Berura* asserted. Therefore, even if it is not ideal to use nonkosher leather for this plate, the tefillin would be kosher nonetheless.

107. Maran the Rishon Letziyon (responsa *Yabia Omer*, Vol. I, #1) ruled that this is kosher since the gelatin is not needed for the construction of the tefillin. Furthermore, this treatment enhances the beauty of the tefillin.