

## The Proper Placement for the Tefillin Shel Yad

### Introduction

When instructing us about the mitzvah of *tefillin*, the Torah (**Devarim 6:8**) describes the location where they must be placed: וקשרתם לאות על ירך והיו לטטפת בין עיניך – “You shall place them as a sign upon your hand and they shall be as *totafo*s between your eyes.” But a simple reading of these words still does not tell us where on the hand — and head — the *tefillin* must be bound. To determine the precise location, we need to explore the *sugya* in depth, which we will *be”H* attempt to do in the coming articles. This article will focus on the *tefillin shel yad*’s placement, and *be”H* next week we will address the *tefillin shel rosh*.

It should be noted that one whose *tefillin* are in the wrong spot has not fulfilled the mitzvah [see **Mishnah Berurah (27:2)**]. In the words of the **Pri Megadim (MZ 27:6)**, “*Tefillin* that are not in the correct place are as though they are in their case.” This is true even if just a portion of the *tefillin* is in the incorrect place; we do not apply the rule of *rubo k’kulo* [see **Mishnah Berurah (27:4)** and **Beur Halachah (27:1 s.v. basasar)**]. This applies to the base of the *tefillin* as well, not just to the *batim* [see **Mishnah Berurah (27:34)**].

### Defining the Yad

Now, the **Tosefta (Shabbos 9:15)** teaches us that a “*yad*” refers to one’s arm, not to his hand, as we find in **Sefer Shoftim (15:14)**. When Shimshon was given over to the Pelishtim, the *pasuk* first describes ropes tied around his “arm,” and then says that they were tied around his “hands.” Evidently, the term “*yad*” can be used when referring to an arm as well. However, we still need to determine where on the arm the *tefillin* should be bound. To address this, the **Gemara (Eruvin 95b)** brings a *derashah* which states that “*al yadcha*” refers to the “*kibores*.”

### Defining the Kibores

Clearly, the proper place for the *tefillin shel yad* is on the *kibores*. However, we still need to understand where on the arm the *kibores* is. The Gemara in **Menachos (37b)** tells us that it is the area of one’s arm that protrudes. **Rashi (in Eruvin)** writes that the *kibores* is “an *eiver* in the middle of one’s arm,” and in **Menachos (37b)** he adds that the *kibores* is “near the shoulder.” **Tosafos (in Eruvin)** tells us that the *kibores* is the *kevutzas basar*, gathering of flesh, between the shoulder and elbow; probably referring to the bicep. In **Menachos (37a)**, **Tosafos** adds that it is “the height of flesh on one’s arm.” The **Rambam (Tefillin 4:2)**, as well, writes that the proper location is “on one’s left [hand], on the *kibores* which is the swollen flesh on the arm between the shoulder and elbow, so that when one places his arm by his ribs, the *tefillin* is opposite his heart, in fulfillment of the *pasuk (ibid. 6:6)* והיו הדברים על לבבך – “And these words [i.e., that are placed inside the *tefillin*] should be on your heart.” These *Rishonim* clearly indicate that the *derashos* of the Gemara — in **Eruvin** and **Menachos** — are not arguing with each other; the *tefillin* are placed on the *kibores* (bicep), which is the place where the flesh protrudes, and is also opposite one’s heart. Other *Rishonim* concur [many are cited in **Shu”t Vayashav Hayam (2:4)**]; indeed, this is the *psak* of the **Tur (27:1)**. The **Tur** adds that one should place the *tefillin* tilted slightly toward his body in such a way that when he lowers his arm, they will be exactly opposite the heart.

### The Understanding of Rabbeinu Peretz

The **Smak (153)** agrees with the above *Rishonim* (i.e., that the *shel yad* is placed on the bicep). In his comments to the **Smak**, **Rabbeinu Peretz (os beis)** points out that the *tefillin* must nevertheless only be placed on the lower half of the arm (closer to the elbow); they may not be placed higher on the arm. It is clear from the **Beis Yosef (Bedek Habayis 27:1)** that he understood Rabbeinu Peretz to mean that anywhere on the lower half of the arm is valid, even below the bicep. The **Beis Yosef** himself, however, cautions against relying on this opinion, since it does not align with the simple understanding of the Gemara and most *Rishonim*. Rather, he says, one must be careful to place the *tefillin* only on the bicep.

The **Rema (27:1)**, however, had a different understanding of Rabbeinu Peretz. Certainly Rabbeinu Peretz agrees that the *tefillin* must be bound on the bicep, just that they must be placed only on the lower half of the bicep (section “b” in Figure 1). The **Mogen Avraham (27:2)** and **Gra (27:5)** agree that the **Rema**’s explanation of Rabbeinu Peretz is the correct one. However, it appears from **Tosafos Rabbeinu Peretz (Eruvin 95b)** that his intent was in line with the **Beis Yosef**’s understanding.

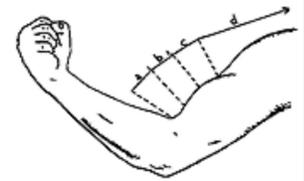


Figure 1

### The Proper Place on the Kibores

Seemingly, according to the *Rishonim* who explain *kibores* to mean the bicep, one can place his *tefillin shel yad* anywhere on the bicep. This is certainly how the **Rema**, **Mogen Avraham**, and **Gra** understood, as they write that this is the crux of the *machlokes* between the **Smak** (who agrees with the other *Rishonim*) and Rabbeinu Peretz (who limits the placement to only the lower half of the bicep).

It emerges that there are three *shitos* about the the *Rishonim*’s opinion as to the proper placement of the *shel yad*. According to most *Rishonim*, one can bind them anywhere on the bicep (sections “b” and “c” in the above figure). According to the **Beis Yosef**’s understanding of Rabbeinu Peretz, anywhere on the bottom half of the arm is valid (sections “a” and “b”), whereas according to the **Rema**’s understanding of Rabbeinu Peretz, one may only place them on the lower half of the bicep (section “b”).

### The Psak of the Shulchan Aruch and Rema

The **Shulchan Aruch (27:1)** simply writes that the proper placement for the *tefillin shel yad* is on one’s bicep. It would seem from the brevity of his words that he means to *psaken* like the above *Rishonim* who allow *tefillin* to be placed on the entire bicep. However, the **Rema** (as explained by the **Mogen Avraham** *ibid.*) writes that one should be *machmir* like Rabbeinu Peretz and only place them on the bottom half of the bicep (section “b”).

### The Difficulty with the Shulchan Aruch

Numerous *Acharonim* make the point that later in this *siman*, the **Shul**

*chan Aruch* writes something that is difficult to understand in light of the above. In *se'if 7*, he allows someone with a wound on his bicep to place his *tefillin* lower (i.e., closer to the elbow) than the normal place for *tefillin*. This would seem to follow the *shitah* of Rabbeinu Peretz (as understood by the *Beis Yosef* in *Bedek Habayis*), who permits the entire bottom half of the arm. This, points out the **Mogen Avraham (ibid.)**, appears to contradict the *Shulchan Aruch's* own words in *Bedek Habayis* – that one should not rely on Rabbeinu Peretz.

It is unclear whether the *Magen Avraham* offered a resolution to this issue. The **Machatzis Hashekel** and **Chida (Machazik Berachah 27:4)** both maintain that he left this matter unresolved. The **Pri Megadim** and **Yad Ephraim**, however, explain that when the *Mogen Avraham* goes on to explain the *shitah* of Rabbeinu Peretz and the *Rema* — that they meant to allow only the bottom half of the bicep — he really means to say that this is also the intent of the *Shulchan Aruch* (unlike the *Bedek Habayis's* understanding of Rabbeinu Peretz).

However, this explanation is difficult to understand, as it would emerge that the *Shulchan Aruch* in *se'if 7* means to minimize the *shiur* for the correct placement of *tefillin*, whereas the context of that *se'if* is to explain that the *shiur* is really larger, which is why someone who has a wound can place them lower than normal! For this reason, the **Maamar Mordechai (27:1)** rejects this explanation. Rather, he says, the *Shulchan Aruch* in *se'if 7* meant to retract what he wrote in *Bedek Habayis* (he cites the **Knesses Hagedolah** who says that Rav Yosef Karo wrote the *Shulchan Aruch* after he wrote *Bedek Habayis*). Thus, the *Shulchan Aruch* really holds that one may rely on the *shitah* of Rabbeinu Peretz who allows one to place *tefillin* anywhere on the bottom half of the arm, even below the bicep.

In either case, the *Acharonim* above were only addressing the contradiction between *se'if 7* (one may rely on Rabbeinu Peretz) and the *Bedek Habayis* (one should not rely on Rabbeinu Peretz). They do not, however, address the fact that in **Shulchan Aruch (se'if 1)**, he seems to *psaken* that the entire bicep is valid for *tefillin*, which contradicts his words in *Bedek Habayis*. To resolve this discrepancy, the **Mishnah Berurah (27:4)** explains that although in *se'if 1* the *Shulchan Aruch* was not being specific about where on the bicep is valid, it is evident from *se'if 7* that he meant only the lower half.

It would emerge that according to the aforementioned *Pri Megadim*, *Yad Ephraim*, and *Mishnah Berurah*, the *Shulchan Aruch* would not allow one to place the *shel yad* on the upper half of the bicep. However, **Rav Yaakov Hillel (Vayashav Hayam 2:4:3)** has tremendous difficulty in accepting this. This is because in *se'if 1*, the *Shulchan Aruch* writes that *tefillin* are placed on the bicep, which would seem to indicate — like most *Rishonim* and the simple understanding of the *Gemara* — that the entire bicep is valid. The *Beis Yosef* (beginning of *siman 27*) doesn't even mention Rabbeinu Peretz's opinion. Additionally, asks Rav Hillel, if the *Shulchan Aruch* was indeed being vague in *se'if 1* and intended to rely on his explanation later on, he should have placed this explanation (that really, only the bottom half of the bicep is valid) in the following *se'if*. Furthermore, such a fundamental *halachah* (the correct location for *tefillin*) should have been stated explicitly, not mentioned backhandedly while discussing what to do when one is wounded.

Therefore, Rav Hillel explains the *Shulchan Aruch* as follows: In *se'if 1*, he was following the simple understanding of the *Gemara* and most *Rishonim* in ruling that the entire bicep is kosher for *tefillin*. Rav Hillel

supports this explanation from the explicit words of the **Kesef Mishnah (Tefillin 4:2)**. Commenting on the ruling of the **Rambam** that the (entire) *kibores* is valid for *tefillin*, the *Kesef Mishnah* says that other *Rishonim* agree, and he concludes, "And this is the indisputable custom."

Rav Hillel continues. In *se'if 7*, the reason that the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that one who is wounded on his bicep should still put on *tefillin* is because there is enough room on the bicep for two pairs of *tefillin*! Thus, if he is wounded in the upper half, he can place the *tefillin* on the lower half and vice versa. The *Shulchan Aruch* then adds that although in *Bedek Habayis*, he wrote that one should not rely on Rabbeinu Peretz who permits placing *tefillin* even below the bicep, nevertheless a wound victim who lacks space on his bicep should still put on *tefillin*. It is better to rely on Rabbeinu Peretz *b'shaas hadechak* than to miss out on the mitzvah of *tefillin*. But, asserts Rav Hillel, the *Shulchan Aruch* never meant to bring Rabbeinu Peretz's opinion as a *chumra* and to contradict what he wrote earlier (in *se'if 1*, that even the upper half of the bicep is kosher for *tefillin*). [Rav Hillel writes that the **Amudei Ha'arazim** (in his *peirush* on the *Yereim, siman 16 s.v. u'bazeh meyushav*) and the **Bnei Tzion (27:5)** explain the *Shulchan Aruch* like this as well.] Rav Hillel adds that he has reason to believe that Rav Yosef Karo authored *Bedek Habayis* after he authored the *Shulchan Aruch*, unlike the aforementioned *Knesses Hagedolah*. It follows that when the *Bedek Habayis* wrote not to rely on Rabbeinu Peretz, he intended to retract his ruling in *Shulchan Aruch se'if 7*, that at a time of need one can rely on Rabbeinu Peretz.

#### Halachah L'maaseh

To summarize: According to the *Rema*, one should be stringent and bind his *tefillin* onto the lower half of his bicep (section "b"). Most *Acharonim* understand that the *Shulchan Aruch* means to hold this way as well. Indeed, this was the *psak* of the **Ben Ish Chai (Chayei Sara 6)** and **Rav David Yosef (Halachah Berurah 27:3, Otzros Yosef siman 7)**. Accordingly, they write that those who wear two pairs of *tefillin* simultaneously should ensure that the *battim* are small enough to both fit on the lower half of the bicep. See **Ohr Letzion (2:3:2)** and *Halachah Berurah* (ibid.) who add that if they cannot both fit on the lower half of the bicep, it is better to wear them separately.

Other *Acharonim*, however, understand the *Shulchan Aruch* to mean that one may place the *tefillin* anywhere on his bicep. We mentioned that this is the *psak* of **Rav Yaakov Hillel**. This was also the *psak* of the **Gra (27:5, 19)**. Rav Hillel even writes that he really believes that this is the correct understanding in the *Rema* as well — that he only meant to be *machmir lechatchilah* like (his understanding of) Rabbeinu Peretz. Rav Hillel points out that this was also the understanding of the **Netziv (Haamek Sh'eilah, Bo 45, Eikev 145)**. However, the **Mishnah Berurah (27:4)** writes that one should not be lenient regarding this matter.

Nonetheless, the **Mishnah Berurah (27:29)** does write that if one is wounded on the lower half of his bicep, the next best place to put his *tefillin* is the upper half of the bicep (and not below the bicep). He writes this earlier as well (27:4), regarding one whose *tefillin* are too large and won't fit on the lower half of his bicep — that it is better to place them higher, since that is *psak* of most *Rishonim* [see also **Aruch Hashulchan (27:4)**. See, however, **Chayei Adam (14:10)** who doesn't seem to differentiate between the upper half of the bicep and below the bicep]. Perhaps one can even make a *berachah* [see **Mishnah Berurah (27:4, 29)** and **Kaf Hachaim (27:3)**].