TOPIC

TEFILLIN AND BAR MITZVAH
Halachically Speaking is a monthly publication compiled by Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits, a former chaver kollal of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath and a musmach of Harav Yisroel Belsky zt"l. Rabbi Lebovits currently works as the Rabbinical Administrator for the KOF-K Kosher Supervision.

Each issue reviews a different area of contemporary halacha with an emphasis on practical applications of the principles discussed. Significant time is spent ensuring the inclusion of all relevant shittos on each topic, as well as the psak of Harav Yisroel Belsky, zt"l on current issues.

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When a young boy approaches the age of bar mitzvah, it is time to consider when to put on tefillin. Does he start when he becomes thirteen years of age, or perhaps earlier? What are the reasons for these customs? Why do we wait this long at all? When he puts on tefillin for the first time, does he recite a Shehecheyanu?

Source
The Gemara\(^1\) says that when a child can make sure he watches the tefillin properly, his father should buy him tefillin.\(^2\) Rashi\(^3\) explains that he understands that he may not enter the bathroom with the tefillin. Others say that it means the child will refrain from passing gas while wearing them.\(^4\)

Thirteen or Younger
The opinion of the Ba’al Ha’itur\(^5\) is that the Gemara is referring to a child who is thirteen years old and one day. It is important to note that most poskim disagree with this opinion, and maintain that the child is someone who reached the age of chinuch, even though he is under thirteen.\(^6\) The Shulchan Aruch\(^7\) simply applies the rule to a

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1. Sukkah 42a. See Maseches Eruchin 2b.
2. Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 37:3.
3. Maseches Sukkah 42a, “lishmor.”
4. Tur 37; Levush 3; Eliyahu Zuta 1; Shulchan Aruch Harav 3.
7. O.C. 37:3.
child who can watch the tefillin to make sure it remains pure, but does not give an age.

The Rema\(^8\) (and others)\(^9\) agrees with the Ba’al Ha’itur, and maintains that a boy begins to wear tefillin when he reaches thirteen years old and one day (morning of his birthday).\(^10\) Some explain that since we no longer wear tefillin all day, once the child is thirteen he knows to be careful with watching them properly.\(^11\)

The Magen Avraham\(^12\) mentions that before this time frame of thirteen one does not put on tefillin.

**Thirteen Years Old\(^13\)**

Many have the practice that tefillin are not placed on a child before he reaches the age of thirteen.\(^14\) This is especially true today, when even boys at the age of thirteen have a hard time making sure to watch them properly, so one should not do so before thirteen.\(^15\)

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8. O.C. 37:3.

9. Pri Megadim Eishel Avraham 3; Levush 3; Shulchan Hatohar 4; Darchei Chaim V’shalom 79; Taamei Haminhagim page 12; footnote; Tzitz Eliezer 13:10; Minhag Yisrael Torah 37. See Me’asef L’chol Hamachanos 13; Toras Yekusiel 2:66. Refer to Natei Gavriel Bar Mitzvah 33:1; footnote 1, also pages 221-223; Leket Hakemach Hachadash 37; pages 171-172; Emes L’Yaakov 37.

10. See Biur Halachah, O.C. 37, “v’yeish omrim.”


12. 3; Mishnah Berurah 10.

13. On the number 13 and bar mitzvah see Teshuvos HaRosh 16:1; Mishnah Berurah 55:40; Yalkut Yosef 37; pages 656-657. Obviously, we go according to the Jewish date for one’s bar mitzvah and not according to the non-Jewish calendar (Yalkut Yosef 37; page 656; footnote 5). In regard to one who was born during bein hashmashos, see Os Chaim 37:6.

14. Darchei Moshe 2; Rema 3; Levush 3.

The practice of most chassidim is to place the tefillin on the day of the bar mitzvah.16

Another reason not to place them before thirteen is that by the time he turns thirteen he will not be as excited about the mitzvah.17

**Why Wait until Thirteen?**

Why is it that we wait until the child is thirteen for tefillin, but other mitzvos like lulav, tzitzis and sukkah begin at an earlier stage? Some suggest that there is no issur involved in doing other mitzvos, but there could be a problem if the child does not maintain the proper holiness of the tefillin. Therefore, we wait until he is older.18 Although one who says Krias Shema without tefillin is testifying falsely, since it says to tie the tefillin and he is not doing so,19 there is no concern with a child. Since he is pasul from testifying, there is no issue, so we put on tefillin when he is thirteenth and able to testify.20

**Thirteen but Didn’t Reach Puberty**

Those who have the custom to put on tefillin at thirteen years would do so even before the boy shows signs of puberty.21

**Before Thirteen**

Some have the practice to place tefillin two or three

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17. Os Chaim 37:5.
20. Bar Mitzvah (Kroizer) page 103.
21. Pri Megadim Eishel Avraham 4; Shaarei Teshuvah 4; Shulchan Aruch Harav 3; Mishnah Berurah 11; see Biur Halachah, “v’yeish.” See Rav Akiva Eiger 37.
months before the boy’s thirteenth birthday. Others start even earlier. When placing tefillin before thirteen, the child makes a brachah as well.

Some have the custom to start a month before the thirteenth birthday. The practice among certain Sephardim is to have a child put on tefillin even two or three years before bar mitzvah.

If a boy is putting on tefillin before thirteen, one should make sure he is not counted towards a minyan.

One possible reason for starting early is to get the boy in the habit of putting them on correctly.

### Orphan

Some maintain that an orphan puts on tefillin a year (or half year) before his thirteenth birthday. Others are not sure of the source for this. The custom is not to do this.

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22. Magen Avraham 4; Shulchan Aruch Harav 3; Chayei Adam 66:2; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 10:24; Biur Halachah, O.C. 37, “v’chein”; Me’am Lo’ez Eikev page 557. This is the custom of Chabad (Sha’arei Halachah U’minhag 1:32). See Sha’arei Halachah U’minhag 1:pages 80-81.

23. Refer to Bach 37; Eliyahu Zuta 1; Birchei Yosef 5, 7; Kaf Hachaim 14; Biur Halachah, O.C. 37; “v’chein.” See Natei Gavriel Bar Mitzvah 33:2.


26. Shulchan Gavoah 5; Yafei L’lev 37; Ohr L’tzion 2:44:47; Yabia Omer, O.C. 6:3.


28. Os Chaim 37:5.

29. Likutei Maharich 1:page 19b (old).


32. Daas Kedoshim 37:3; Os Chaim 5; Natei Gavriel Bar Mitzvah 33:7; Teshuvos V’hanahagos 1:53; Halichos Shlomo Tefillah 4:footnote 34.
Some explain that since he has no father to teach him how to put on tefillin, we start training him early.33

Others contend that it is a merit for the deceased parent that the child place tefillin earlier than usual.34

**Deaf or Abnormal**

A deaf or abnormal child does not put on tefillin since he will not know how to watch them properly.35

**Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin**

Although a bar mitzvah boy puts on Rashi tefillin, he does not put on Rabbeinu Tam tefillin until he marries.36

**Shehecheyanu**

There is a discussion in the poskim if a bar mitzvah boy recites a Shehecheyanu when placing the tefillin for the first time. On one hand, he should recite a Shehecheyanu since it is an exciting time.37 On the other hand, this brachah was only instituted for a recurring mitzvah.38

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35. Aruch Hashulchan 4. See Mishnah Berurah 12, which differentiates on the kind of deaf mute.

36. Os Chaim 37:5; Mishneh Halachos 6:12; Natei Gavriel Bar Mitzvah 36:7. The custom of Chabad is that bar mitzvah boys put on Rabbeinu Tam as well (Sha’arei Halachah U’minhag 1:page 78; see Bar Mitzvah [Kroizer] page 104:footnote 25).

37. Rambam Hilchos Brachos 10:2. Others say it is not a joy since one has to make sure to have a clean body (Bach, O.C. 22; Sha’arei Teshuvah 22; see Bar Mitzvah [Kroizer] pages 116-117). Refer to Mor U’ketziah 27; Chinah D’chaya 89; Keren L’Dovid, O.C. 57; Chasam Sofer, O.C. 55.

38. Refer to Shach, Y.D. 28:5; Y.D. 289:1; Levush, O.C. 22:1; Taz 1; Elyah Rabbah 2; Aruch Hashulchan 3; Machzir Brachah 2; Kaf Hachaim (Palagi) 10:8; Yafei L’ev 22:1; Me’asef L’chol Hamachanos 19; Birur Halachah 22:pages 28-31, 36; Chanoch L’nai’ar page 37; Halachah Berurah 22:5:footnote 12; Piskei Teshuvos 22:footnotes 7, 10 in depth; Yecheveh Da’as 2:31; Chayei Moshe 37:page 182; Mishneh Halachos 6:6; Bar Mitzvah
If he starts before his bar mitzvah, no brachah of Shehecheyanu is recited. 39 Before bar mitzvah he is still a child, so he does not recite Shehecheyanu. When he becomes bar mitzvah, it is no longer his first time. 40

If he starts when he becomes thirteen, there is a debate regarding Shehecheyanu. Therefore, he should buy a new garment and make a Shehecheyanu on it, and have the tefillin in mind. 41

**Practice**

It seems that most chassidim wait until the boy is thirteen, 42 while others start a month, or two to three months before. 43 Sephardim start much earlier. 44

**Special Occasion**

Sometimes, the family might wish for the bar mitzvah boy to put on tefillin for the first time in the presence of a tzaddik. 45 The visit often will not fit with the family’s customary schedule of placing tefillin for the first time. In this situation, one can put it on early. 46

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42. Refer to Birur HALachah 37:pages 34-35; Chinuch Yisrael 1:page 146; Natei Gavriel Bar Mitzvah 33:3.

43. Minhag Yisrael Torah 37.

44. Yechaveh Da’as 2:4.

45. Refer to Mishmeres Shalom 4:4; Leket Hakemach HACKdash 37:page 173.

46. Natei Gavriel Bar Mitzvah 33:5.
The same is true for a family from overseas that wishes to go to the Kosel to put on tefillin.

Once he starts early for whatever reason, he must continue.47

**Chol Hamoed**

If one becomes bar mitzvah on Chol Hamoed and his custom is not to put on tefillin then, he starts after Yom Tov.48

**Pesach**

If the bar mitzvah falls out on Pesach, he should put on the tefillin before Pesach so as not to go many days without putting on tefillin.49

**Tishah B’Av**

One whose bar mitzvah falls out on Tishah B’Av should put on tefillin at Shacharis on Erev Tishah B’Av.50

**Leap Year**

There is a discussion regarding someone who was born in a regular non-leap year, and the bar mitzvah falls out in a leap year. In which Adar is his bar mitzvah? If his custom is to place tefillin a few months before his birthday, there is no issue since he will put them on early, but if his custom is to place it on the day of his bar mitzvah, some suggest to start early in this case.51

47. Natei Gavriel Bar Mitzvah 33:9.


51. Refer to Me’asef L’chol Hamachanos 15; Leket Hakemach Hachadash 37:page 172; Shaarei Halachah U’minhag 1:pages 77-78; Tzitz Eliezer 13:10.
Practicing

When practicing with tefillin before the bar mitzvah, there is no issue with placing the shel rosh before the shel yad, although this is not the proper order when performing the mitzvah.52

52. Natei Gavriel Bar Mitzvah 34:5. There is no concern of an adult giving a child learning to put on tefillin his tefillin to try on (Rivevos Ephraim 1:30, 2:24).
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