

תפלין

Tefillin, Lesson 1

“Tefillin” is the Aramaic term that became common to refer to what the Tanach calls **טוטפות**, “Totafot.” Three times the Scriptures speak of “binding *totafot*” upon the forehead and the arm: Exodus 13:16; Deuteronomy 6:8; Deuteronomy 11:18. One additional time the text commands that the events of the Exodus should be a “sign (**אות**) on the forehead and on the arm (Exodus 13:9). These four texts are therefore written on small parchments, and placed in the boxes (called **בתים**, “houses”).



There is one box for the head (**של ראש**) and one for the arm (**של יד**). The one for the head is divided into four compartments, one for each of the texts. The **בית** for the arm, however, is not divided, and all four are written on one parchment.

The **בתים** (batim) are strapped to the arm and to the head by means of leather straps called **רצועות**, *retzuot*. The strap holding the **בית של ראש** (head tefillin) is joined by a knot worn at the back of the head, especially tied to form the letter **ע**. On the leather strap binding the **בית של יד** (tefillin for the hand) a special knot is formed to resemble a **ד**. Thus, the two form the word **עד**, “witness” or “testimony,” reminding us that these are worn as a testimony of G-d’s faithfulness to us in redeeming us from Egypt and bringing us into covenant with Him at Mt. Sinai.

The **בית של ראש** (head tefillin) is worn just at the hairline, and in such a manner that one can see it by looking up. The **בית של יד** (tefillin for the hand) is worn on the opposite arm most used (left arm for right-handed people, right arm for left-handed people) and positioned in such a way as to be pointing toward the heart. This is a reminder that the Torah commands us to “bind these upon the heart” and that the testimony of our covenant relationship with HaShem should govern all of our actions. Also, since the Hebrew word **יד** (hand) can also indicate “strength,” we are reminded that our strength is in the L-rd and our covenant relationship with Him through Yeshua.

After the strap of the **יד** (hand) is wrapped seven times around the arm, it is then wrapped around the hand in such a way as to form a **ש**. With the knot in the shape of a **ד**, this forms **שדי**, from **אל שדי**. Then the strap is wrapped around the finger while Hosea 2:19-20 is recited. This reminds us that the putting on of tefillin is a renewal of our covenant vows to HaShem in the form of a wedding.