The Chicago Center
Digest
Mishna Berura
THE DAILY RESOURCE FOR MISHNA BERURA YOMI
Thurs, Dec 11, 2025 ■ כ"א כסלו, תשפ"ו
סימן ל"ג סעיף ג'

Overview

Siman 33 Seif 3:

The leather of the *retzuos* must come from the hide of a kosher animal and the hide must be treated for the sake of the *mitzvah*. *Retzuos* may be made from hide or parchment. *Halacha L'Moshe M'Sinai* teaches that the *retzuos* must be black on the outside. The inside surface may be any color except red since someone may think that the red came from bloody sores.

- The term צריך as used in this *seif* means that it is essential. (M.B. 17)
- The blackening of the *retzuos* must be done for the sake of the *mitzvah*. (M.B. 18)
- If the *retzuos* were not treated for the sake of the *mitzvah,* coloring them black for the sake of the *mitzvah* will not help. (M.B. 18)
- Baruch She'amar writes that the *retzuos* should be blackened like a raven. (M.B. 19)
- If the color fades they must be darkened black again and one should pay special attention to spots where the *retzuos* have a tendency to become worn. (M.B. 19)
- Although Rambam rules that the inside of the *retzuos* must be colored black, we do not subscribe to that position. (M.B. 21)

Stories to Share

Beautifying the Tefillin

ש"ע ס' ל"ג, ס' ג': "שיהיו הרצועות שחורות מבחוץ אבל מצד פנים..."

A certain man needed new straps for his tefillin and wondered what he should do. As the Mishnah Berurah brings on today's amud, the Rambam holds that one should also blacken the inside of the retzuos, and a certain establishment was selling straps which were blackened on both sides. He wondered whether he should be stringent and purchase the dually blackened straps or not. After all, what could he lose?

But he was hesitant to just do as he felt, since perhaps there was a problem with blackening the inside of the straps, so he consulted with a halachic authority on the matter. When his question reached Rav Moshe Sternbuch, shlit"a, he ruled that there was indeed a reason not to be stringent. "The Arizal also rules that the inside of the tefillin straps should be blackened. I myself saw the tefillin of the Maharil Diskin, and their retzuos were clearly blackened on both sides.

"But when I discussed this matter with the Brisker Rav, he explained that there was a potentially serious problem with blackening the inside of the retzuos. Since according to most poskim such blackening was not required, it is plausible that the dried ink constitutes a hefsek between the tefillin straps and one's arm. Since even according to the Rambam one is not obligated to blacken the straps and doing so is merely a way to beautify the tefillin, the Brisker Rav only blackened one side of his tefillin. Another reason why it is not necessary to be stringent like the Rambam is since, for our tefillin, blackening the inside is not means of beautifying that can be easily seen. It is therefore preferable to follow the usual custom and blacken only the outside."

Halacha Highlight

Coloring the *retzuos* black

Shulchan Aruch Siman 33 Seif 3

הלכה למשה מסיני שיהיו הרצועות שחרת מבחוץ

***Halacha L'Moshe M'Sinai* is that the *retzuos* should be colored black on the outside**

Shulchan Aruch relates that *Halacha L'Moshe M'Sinai* teaches that the *retzuos* must be black on the outside but may be any color other than red on the inside. Biur Halacha (ד"ה הרצועות וע"ע במ"ב ס"ק י"ט) references Baruch She'amar who writes that one should paint the *retzuos* black. When they dry they should be painted a second time and after drying even a third time until they are black as a raven. Biur Halacha, however, writes that in his opinion this procedure is only *l'chatchila* and all that is necessary is that the *retzuos* should be called black. Consequently, even if the *retzuos* appear blue or brown they are valid (ע' פסקי תשובות אות ד').

Sefer Keses HaSofer (סי' כ"ג סע' ב') writes that one should color even the edges of the *retzuos* that are visible and that this may even be required by *Halacha L'Moshe M'Sinai*. Pri Megadim, however, seems to disagree with this position and Teshuvas Shevet HaLevi (ח"ט סי' ט"ז) writes that since Shulchan Aruch and commentators did not mention this practice even as a stringency it must for a reason although unknown to us. Consequently, one need not be concerned with complying with this stringency.

Mishnah Berurah (ס"ק י"ט) mentions that one must pay special attention to the part of the *retzuos* near the knots since the *retzua* in that area has a tendency to become worn and could easily lose its color. This concern indicates that the principle *rubo k'kulo* – the majority is similar to the full amount – does not apply and one must be sure that his *retzuos* are completely black. This is the position expressed by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in contrast to the position held by Rav Yosef Chaim Sonenfeld who wrote that *b'dieved* one could rely on the principle of *rubo k'kulo* (ע' מ"ב מהדורת דרשו העי' 14). Rav Auerbach does, however, maintain a lenient perspective on the following occurrence (הליכות שלמה תפלה פ"ד דבר הלכה אות ח'). If the overall appearance of the *retzua* is black but there are a couple of spots that have lost their color the *retzuos* are valid but nevertheless one should darken those spots.