

TEFILLIN

The word “tefillin” comes from the Hebrew root word for “prayer” (t’fillah), laying everything out in the presence of Yah. Tefillin are strange looking black boxes and leather strap type attachments that many Orthodox Jews wear, claiming its origin derives from the torah. This of course is as far from the truth as east is from west, but the Orthodox Jews place more priority on their man-made traditions than on the torah, which they claim to follow. In this brief teaching I will reveal the origin of tefillin as ancient amulets of the pagans.

Any visitor to Israel will notice Orthodox Jews wearing somewhat strange- looking leather boxes on their heads and straps around their arms while they pray. In many cities and settlements of Israel, religious Jews will also ‘set up shop’ in the city center on Fridays, with an assortment of these boxes and straps and encourage the men who pass by to ‘lay tefillin’ – fulfilling the mitzvah (commandment) to put this box on their forehead and tie the straps to their arm.

From where does this Jewish custom originate and what is its significance to us as Believers in Yeshua the Messiah?

An ancient command in scripture is that Jewish people are to remember torah and always have it on their mind, manifesting as proper deeds.

Deut. 11:18 *“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.”* Just as someone might tie a string around his or her finger to remind

them of something they must remember to do, the tefillin is supposedly seen by the Jews as a physical reminder of our obligation to obey the commandments of Yah. The Hebrew word (tefillin) relates to the word for prayer (t’fillah). According to tradition, the tefillin are worn during morning prayers. The idea is that as they pray, they focus on Yah’s commandments, reminding them that these instructions should be on their mind (forehead) and applied to their life by of deeds, action, (on their hand).

According to the tradition of the Sages when looking at the human body, your right side is considered to be the spirit side and the left the truth side. We see this in the use of phylacteries and tefillin. That’s why observant Jews wrap the tefillin around their left arm, a pouch of scripture by their heart, and a box of scripture (phylactery) on their forehead. They wrap the tefillin around their left arm and finish by lacing it in the fingers, wrapping it around the ring finger, which they say represents the covenant. They bind the covenant finger to the hand. They say this represents truth, and if you have truth you have faith. Faith comes by hearing and truth comes from having faith. The right hand holds the sword of the spirit and the left hand the shield of faith. Because we are to walk in spirit and in truth, tradition says you always put your right foot forward first when you walk. We are to be balanced with spirit



and in truth on our two feet.

What about the significance of the tefillin to Re-newed Covenant Believers?

Under the renewed covenant, the Torah (law) of Yah is supposed to be on their minds, written on their hearts (Jer. 31:33).

The leather box contains a parchment with hand scripted passages from the Torah (Exod. 13:1-10, 11-16, Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21). These passages of scripture all contain the commandment to bind the Word of God on one’s forehead and hand. The custom represents Israel’s marriage covenant to Yah, and as the straps are wrapped around the ring finger, the scripture is read: **Hebr. 2:19-20** *“I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion, I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge Yahveh.”*

What does the Re-newed Testament have to say about the tefillin?

Yeshua, a Torah-observant Jew Himself, probably did not condemn the use of tefillin or tzitzit, but exposed the hypocrisy of those who wore them to impress others, and who over-emphasized the external ritual rather than focusing on their spiritual significance (Matt. 23:4-5). It is interesting to note that in the Book of Revelation, Yochanan (John) writes that the coming false prophet will force everyone to receive his mark on their hand or forehead. The world will be required to wear the name of the false Messiah (666) in order to buy or sell anything (Rev. 13:16-18). The message is clear to those who understand the significance of this Biblical custom of tefillin. Hasatan (the adversary) is still attempting to usurp Yah’s rightful place in our lives by substituting his mark on the very place on our bodies where observant Jews tie the Word of Yah!

Many of the Orthodox Jews who love and serve the God of Israel and keep His commandments, choose to wear tefillin because of their man-made tradition.

Deut. 11:18 *“You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.”*

The tefillin consists of two black boxes, one cubic inch, sewn together with exactly twelve stitches. Four portions of Torah are written inside. One box is mounted with leather straps to the center of the forehead, and one is strapped with leather to the left arm, above the elbow, or the hand.

- 1) **SHEMA** Deut. 6:4-9 --The Shema prayer. Pronouncing the unity of one God.
- 2) **VEHAYAH** Deut. 11:13-21--Expressing God’s assurance of reward to those who observe the precepts of Torah.
- 3) **KADESH** Exod. 13:1-10--Underscoring the duty of the Jewish people to remember their redemption from Egyptian bondage.
- 4) **VEHAYAH** Exod. 13:11-16--Reminding the Jew of his obligation to inform his children of these matters.

The box on the left hand has one piece of parchment paper only. The box on the forehead has four separate compartments and parchments because the “frontals” spoken of in Deut. 6:8 is plural.

After the age of thirteen, after their “bar mitzvah”, all male Jewish boys are required to wear tefillin during their daily morning prayers.

The tefillin on the forehead is called “tefillin shel yad”. The tefillin on the forehead (hairline), is called “tefillin shel rosh”. It is the same as that for the arm except it has a strap designed for the head. It is an outward expression of an inward reality that Yah’s law is to be engraved on ones mind. It also represents that “man’s intelligence is under Adonai’s word and therefore to be in submission to it. This is taken literally as per **Jer. 31:33** *“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares Yahveh, “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their Elohim, and they shall be My people.”*

It is even possible that Yeshua may have been forced as a young boy to wear tefillin at one time or another.

The tefillin in Yeshua’s time was probably worn all day like the tallit (tzitzit).

When putting on tefillin it is called “laying on of tefillin”. Tefillin are considered visible symbols of what the individual purposes to do spiritually, submitting the totality of his being to Adonai’s commandments.

Tefillin is wrapped seven times around the left arm, then three times around the hand, and then three times around the middle finger, which is literally constructing the Hebrew letter “shin”, which stands for El Shaddai. While wrapping the tefillin around the fingers only, Hosea 2:21-22 is recited out loud. **Hosea 2:21-22** *“And it will come about in that day that I will respond,” declares Yahveh. I will respond to the heavens, and they will respond to the earth, And the earth will respond to the grain, to the new wine, and to the oil, And they will respond to Jezreel.”*

The tefillin is considered by most Orthodox Jews an outward demonstration of an inward reality. However, the reality is that it makes the Orthodox Jews of today look foolish in public. Our scriptures say that we are indeed to be “peculiar”, “set apart” people, but standing out in a crowd because you look like an oddball is not what was intended in that verse. **Titus 2:14-15** *“Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”* Our good book doesn’t tell us to stand out in a fleshly manner. We are to stand out because we are blessed, obedient and faithful. Being seen with an ugly unclean, long beard, strange clothing, black boxes on our foreheads, and yarmulkes on our head is not being set apart, it is a total distraction. This is another perfect example of oral tradition and Rabbinical teaching gone off the deep end. The idea and symbolism may no doubt be sincere, but the way it is presented makes all those participating in such a tradition an embarrassment to the true Believers of the Holy One Of Israel.

The amulet origin

In the Re-newed Testament tefillin were called “phylacteries”, from the Greek word for protection (Matt. 23:5). The pagan Greeks and ancient Egyptians considered tefillin amulets, worn to ward off evil spirits. Their tefillin represented the power of a snake.

Use of tefillin as an amulet: Biblical scholars and even some of the most prominent rabbinical commentators agree that Deut. 6:8 has nothing to do with physical items like tefillin (phylacteries), and should only be understood symbolically. Biblical research indicates that until the end of the Second Temple era, Deut. 6: 8 was perceived only allegorically and symbolically. In fact, a detailed investigation of the Hebrew in Exod. 13: 9,16 reveals a fascinating parallel between the phrase “Zikaron” (memorial) and the phrase “Totafot” (front):

Exod. 13: 9 *“And it will be for you as a sign in your hand and as a memorial between your eyes.”*

Exod. 13:16 *“It will be like a mark on his hand or your forehead between your eyes.”*

The Hebrew here makes it clear that the biblical interpretation of the phrase “front” should be understood as a synonym for the phrase “memorial” and has nothing to do with the rabbinic command to put on Tefillin.

However, is it based on the Torah of Moses or something else? There is strong evidence that the

practice of putting on certain variations of tefillin was common among the Jews, long before the Pharisee era. In fact, Tefillin-like amulets were commonly adopted from ancient cultures of idol worshipers, especially in the Mediterranean area.

Tefillin were perceived as magical figurative symbols, and the use of such amulets, attached to the head or arms, was practiced in the ancient world by pagans, long before the first century. On the other hand, the sacred writings attached to the body and portrayed as amulets were used by various pagans.

For example, an amulet that looks like tefillin was discovered in Mesopotamia. This particular amulet had a brief inscription, dedicated to an ancient idol. In fact, other ancient religions also used to insert sacred writings in amulets and connect them to the body, as did tefillin.

By the end of the Second Temple Period, the admiration of the Tefillin among the Jewish people was already widespread, and there are testimonies in rabbinic literature that the Sages believed in the mystical power of Tefillin as a good luck charm. They were used for Protection against the evil eye, and all kinds of other bad fortunes.

In the Talmud we see that tefillin and amulets are closely related. Tefillin and amulets were often mentioned together, as a synonym for expression, and the worship of tefillin as good luck charms actually became more popular during the Talmudic period. Many have considered the Tefillin as amulets of divine power that could protect men.

I believe the tefillin of Orthodoxy, is clearly taken from ancient Egypt, where a figure of a sacred snake was tied to the head like a good luck charm, and this resembles traditional tefillin.

Since then, the practice of using tefillin has become more important, and the rabbis have transformed it into a binding practice that is accompanied by laws.

For these and more reasons, I suggest to all who wear them, to abandon non-Biblical Talmudic practices that diminish the commandments of Elohim and Yeshua.

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