

the binding of one's parents' instruction around the heart and the neck (Willis).

The United Church of God, which split from Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God in 1995, retains much of the parent organization's Hebraic identity. However, it argues that there are no HB/OT records of Jews wearing phylacteries, and that the HB/OT instruction to wear them cannot be intended to be observed literally, since Jews do not wear phylacteries on the hand or the bridge of the nose (Deut 11:18), but on the upper arm and forehead. The commandment is thus to be understood metaphorically, enjoining the need to keep God's law faithfully, and to exercise care in what one's mind and hands do (Sexton).

Mainstream Christians, together with New Christian groups, tend to agree that any requirement to use tefillin belongs to an older covenant that is no longer binding on Christians. While the use of phylacteries is not explicitly forbidden, Jesus's comments in Matt 23:5 are regarded as proscribing hypocrisy and undue external manifestations of faith, which should properly come from the heart.

**Bibliography:** ■ Sexton, R., "Should a New Covenant Christian Wear Phylacteries or Prayer Shawls?" *United Church of God: an International Association* (2015; [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org)). ■ Willis, N. B., "Why We Do Not Bind Tefillin," in id., *Nazarene Scripture Studies*, vol. 5 (Nariño 2023; [treeofephraim.org](http://treeofephraim.org)). George D. Chryssides

### III. Literature

The visceral, somatic nature of the biblical command understood as obligating Jews to bind tefillin (phylacteries) on hand and head (see Exod 13:9, 16; Deut 6:8; 11:18) easily makes the performance of the ritual a synecdoche for a life of traditional observance, evoking the yoking of oneself to divine commandments (*mitsvot*). Not for nothing did American Jewish folklore imagine the immigrant's jettisoning of the leather straps and boxes (containing scriptural passages) into New York harbor at first sight of Ellis Island as the symbol of abandonment of tradition in the New World (see Horn). Jewish literature, in its various languages, has similarly utilized tefillin as a powerful symbol of Jewish tradition, and how the Jew is tethered to it while often struggling to untie its cords.

Most famously, Hebrew poet Saul Tchernichowsky placed tefillin upon the body of God in his "Before the Statue of Apollo" (1898). Playing off of both a talmudic passage in which the Almighty is described as donning the phylacteries (with a unique set of passages contained therein; cf. bBer 6a) and the classical distinction between Judaism and Hellenism, the poem's narrator stands before the graven image of the pagan deity, and imagines the Hebrew God bound in the leather straps, ensnared as it were by the halakhic (Jewish legal) codes they represent.

As opposed to much secular Zionist writing of the time, which sought to free the "new Jew" from the restrictions of the law, Tchernichowsky portrays God – conqueror of the Canaanites – as requiring liberation from God's own Torah in which God has been restrained by the rabbinic codes.

Most infamously, modern Israeli poet Yona Wallach repurposes the tefillin's leather as implements of a BDSM erotic role-play, in which the female narrator of her "Tefillin" (1982) asks her partner to rub them across her genitalia and more ("Tie up my hands and legs .../ Put the tefillin in my mouth a bridle bit/ Ride me I am a mare"; Wallach in Z. Lidovsky Cohen: 141). Widely viewed as sacrilege (and not just by the ultra-Orthodox), Wallach's poem caused tremendous controversy. Its admixture of holiness and graphic sexuality, however, acknowledges the bodily intimacy which is built into the performance of the ritual, during which verses with erotic resonances are recited, such as "And I will betroth thee unto Me forever; Yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in justice, And in loving kindness, and in compassion. And I will betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness; And thou shalt know the Lord" (Hos 2:21–22 [JPS]) – mindful that the verb "to know" overlaps in Biblical Hebrew with "carnal knowledge." Similarly, the erotic overtones of the references to "betrothal" between God and the Jewish people, paralleled to that between husband and wife, while the tefillin straps are being wound upon the flesh of one's body are not lost on readers of Wallach's scandalous poem. Further along this theme, Yehuda Amichai's poem "Straight from Your Prejudice" ("Yashar min ha-de'ot ha-qedumot," 1980) the speaker addresses his lover, objectifying her as a ritual object. Like the tefillin, customarily kissed and caressed as they are worn on the body, she becomes a focus of his tender worship. The poem recalls how sensual sacred objects become in the mind and habit of the worshipper ("I want to bind you in phylacteries from top to bottom .../ And to kiss your thighs./ Like a mezuzah at the door"; Amichai: 276). The metaphor reverses as the love act itself becomes sanctified in the mind of the poet, an assertion deeply complicated by the fact that the lover in the poem is a non-Jew. In a drastically different register, contemporary religious Hebrew poet Eliaz Cohen's "Hear, O, Lord" ("Shema' Adonai," 2004) draws his reader's mind from the physicality of the winding of the tefillin straps, and the residual imprint left on the bearer's arm, to numbers tattooed on the flesh of Holocaust survivors.

Avraham Shlonsky's poem "Amal" (1924, Labor) depicted the Zionist pioneers' paving asphalt roads to tefillin's strips of black leather, and asked his readers to reconceive holy worship and divine service in its renewed form of building Palestine as a Jewish homeland. Uri Zvi Greenberg's poem "Ter-

restrial Jerusalem” (“Yerushalayim shel mattah,” 1924) analogizes between Jerusalem and the phylactery worn on the head, while the leather box strapped to the bicep and arm is compared to the Jezreel Valley and its pioneering agricultural settlements. Greenberg, a religious Zionist, is making a statement about the dual seats of intellect and action.

Hebrew literature’s only Nobel laureate, S. Y. Agnon (1888–1970), frequently utilized tefillin as double-edged symbol for memories of pious youth, especially in semi-autobiographical tales of childhood and coming of age at bar mitsvah (when young boys traditionally begin to daily don phylacteries), as well as totems of the nostalgic pull of the past on the present, when for many those old-time customs have been neglected (see, e.g., his short-story “Two Pairs,” 1926). In his epic novel of the twilight of Eastern European Jewry, *A Guest for the Night* (1939), a German Jewish soldier, fighting for the fatherland in the trenches of World War I, has his arm, with the seven circuits of tefillin straps attached, blown off in a mortar attack. The gruesome image of the severed limb is offered as explanation for one of the novel’s central characters ongoing loss of religious faith. This trope may have influenced contemporary Israeli writer Haim Sabato’s prize-winning debut novel on the Yom Kippur War, *Adjusting Sights* (*Te’um kawwanot*; 1998), in which the yeshivah student-soldier narrator caught in combat on the Golan Heights in the early days of fighting struggles to find a moment to pray with tefillin, distracted as he is by the unfolding events and the trauma of his comrade and study-partner, whose charred tefillin satchel is recovered from a burned out tank even as he has gone MIA.

In American-Jewish Hebrew letters consider Philip Roth’s *Patrimony* (1991), a memoir of his father’s final illness and death. Toward the end of his life Roth’s thoroughly secular father Herman deposits his old, long-neglected tefillin, “neatly stored for years and years in a velvet bag in a drawer of the dining-room breakfront,” at the local YMHA. When Philip learns this item of his inheritance has been thoughtlessly disposed of, he confides to his readers: “I wouldn’t have prayed with them, but I might well have cherished them, especially after his death” (Roth: 96). Once again, for the secular Jew, the powerfully symbolic tefillin serve as an engine of nostalgia for a tradition and patrimony one feels bound to in the breach, even as he cannot “bind them for a sign” upon his hand, or place them “as frontlets between his eyes” (Deut 6:8).

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#### IV. Visual Arts

The head *tefillah* (singular of tefillin) is decorated with two versions of the Hebrew letter *shin* (see fig. 17). “*Shin* of tefillin” is obscurely mentioned in Talmud (bMen 35a) but two letters on the head tefillah are overtly discussed only in *Shimusha Rabba*, an early halakhic work. The two versions of the letter *shin* are not identical; one of them is a regular letter with three branches, while the other has four branches and appears only in this context. It is sometimes interpreted as having a mystical meaning, while others see it as a regular *shin* embossed between four branches.

There are several types of objects for storing tefillin when not in use. For additional protection, tefillin were placed in cases made of leather or cardboard; occasionally, silver cases were used. These silver cases emerged in Eastern Europe, probably in the region of Galicia, in the 18th century, and spread to other places, like Austria and Germany (e.g., Tefillin case, silver, 19th cent., Gross Family Collection, no. 018.001.008). These cases were engraved with inscriptions to differentiate between head and arm tefillin; sometimes a head tefillin case bore engraved Hebrew letters *shin*, similar to the head tefillah itself. Cases were decorated with geometrical or floral patterns, illustrated biblical verses, or four animals (tiger, eagle, deer, and lion) mentioned in a well-known passage from the Mish-



Fig. 17 Head tefillin (n.d.)