

Three Days in Judaism

I define a spiritual aid as something that brings one closer to his or her belief, prayer, or connection with what a person believes is a higher power than one's self. When it comes to Judaism there are a number of spiritual aids people can use to help them in their spirituality. In my search I came across what I would consider a spiritual aid for the Jewish way of life called a Tefillin (plural - tefillim).

Tefillim are known as phylacteries, they are black cubic leather boxes with leather straps. Orthodox Jewish men wear tefillim on their head, arm, or hand during weekday morning prayer. Jewish men start wearing tefillim just before their Bar Mitzvah. In the boxes of the tefillim are four hand written texts from the Bible, such as Exodus 13:1-10, 13: 11-16; Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 and 11: 12-21. When making a tefillin there are certain rules and regulations which must be observed to make it proper. It must be made by a specialist and has to be approved by a rabbi, who gives it a certificate stating it has been constructed properly.

When wearing a tefillin on the arm you place it on the weakest part of your upper arm. You then recite a blessing as you wrap it around your arm seven times.

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe,
who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to put on Tefillin.”- *BBC*

The head tefillin is fastened loosely around the man's head right above the original hairline while a blessing is being recited. After being placed on the head a knot at the back of the head is then tightened. The hand tefillin is wrapped around the middle finger three times while reciting the Bible verse Hosea 2: 21-22.

In my three-day experience with the tefillin I found that it is very time consuming. The night before my three-day journey I constructed what would not be a properly made tefillin. I couldn't make my tefillin properly due to me not being Jewish, or a male, and not having proper material or having a rabbi to certify it. Given that challenge, I still was able to take an old leather belt and super glue it to an old plastic block and write the four scriptures given on the block. After constructing my tefillin I taped the blessing that a Jewish man would say on to my bathroom mirror so I could perform my tefillin act during my morning routine.

My first weekday was Monday. I decided to perform the arm tefillin. As soon as I woke up I took the tefillin and read the blessing out loud while trying to wrap it around my arm 7 times. As it was my first attempt it did not go well. I struggled to get the belt around my arm while reading a blessing I was not familiar with out loud. After various attempts, I was able to get the verse read and the tefillin around my arm. My thoughts that day were “what is the point of this?”

The following morning I woke up and did the head tefillin because for that I was able to use both hands and it was easier for me to read and wrap. Aside from feeling silly with a big cube in the middle of my head I again asked myself the purpose of doing this action, yet again I was left feeling clueless. On the third morning I performed the hand tefillin, this time reading Hosea 2: 21-22 out loud. At that moment my thoughts were “what do these three tefillim have in common and how are they used as a Jewish spiritual aid?”

On the tefillim are four scriptures that all proclaim that the three areas of the body should be used to glorify the Lord. This answered my question of placement of the tefillim. Then I thought about the Blessing that the Jews read and in it saying “Lord you command us to put on the tefillin” I saw this as one saying “I am obeying you”. After that I looked at why the Jews only perform this act during weekdays, finding that starting Friday they participate in the Sabbath. I believe that the Jews use the tefillim as a spiritual aid because the Bible scripture tells one to. I also think it's a spiritual aid because the tefillim assist with vocally and physically praising the Lord. While partaking in my three-day Jewish tefillim I did realize things. For example, although it may seem pointless to myself because it is not encouraged in my religion, it does have purpose and does support a way of bringing one closer to the Lord.

Spiritual aids assisting one in coming closer to his or her belief. Jewish Tefillim are black cubic leather boxes used during an Orthodox Jewish man's morning prayer. Prayer is an expression of thanks or request addressed to the Lord or one of higher power. Which in conclusion means that in Judaism Tefillim are a spiritual aid used during a Jewish morning prayer.

Work Cited

BBC. "Judaism: Tefillin." *BBC News*. BBC, 23 June 2009. Web. 15 Sept. 2013