

Deuteronomy 6:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

Analysis

This verse prescribes physical symbols to remind Israel of God's commandments. The Hebrew *qashartam le'ot al-yadekha* (קָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ, 'bind them for a sign upon your hand') and *totafot bein einekha* (טוֹטְפוֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ, 'frontlets between your eyes') gave rise to the Jewish practice of *tefillin* (phylacteries)—small leather boxes containing Scripture portions bound to the arm and forehead during prayer. Whether Moses intended literal physical implements or used metaphorical language for constant mindfulness is debated, but Jewish tradition took it literally from ancient times.

The 'hand' represents action and deed—God's Word should govern what we do. The 'eyes' or forehead represents thought and perspective—God's Word should control what we think and how we see the world. Together, these symbols emphasize that faith must integrate into both conduct and cognition, practical living and mental orientation. The New Testament shifts from external symbols to internal reality: believers are 'living letters' (2 Corinthians 3:3), with God's law written on hearts rather than worn on bodies. Yet the principle remains—visible, tangible reminders can aid spiritual memory and devotion, provided they don't degenerate into empty ritualism (Matthew 23:5).

Historical Context

Archaeological evidence confirms ancient Israelite use of written texts and amulets, though surviving *tefillin* date from later periods (Dead Sea Scrolls era and

beyond). The practice of binding God's words to hand and forehead became standardized in Second Temple Judaism, with specific prayers and rituals. Jesus acknowledged the practice but warned against ostentatious display for human approval (Matthew 23:5). The Pharisees made their phylacteries broad to appear more pious—missing the point that external symbols should prompt internal devotion, not replace it. Early Christians discontinued the practice, understanding it as fulfilled in Christ and superseded by the new covenant's internalization of God's law. Modern Judaism continues the tradition, with observant Jews wearing tefillin during weekday morning prayers, containing passages including Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How can physical symbols or practices aid spiritual memory without becoming empty rituals?
2. What does it mean for God's Word to govern both our actions (hand) and our thoughts (forehead)?
3. How do we maintain the balance between external practices and internal heart-reality in spiritual life?

Interlinear Text

וּקְשַׁרְתָּם	לָא וְת	עַל	יָדְךָ	וְקִיּוֹ
And thou shalt bind	them for a sign	H5921	upon thine hand	H1961
H7194	H226		H3027	
לְקֹטָפוֹת	בֵּין	עֵינֶיךָ:		
and they shall be as frontlets	H996	between thine eyes		
H2903		H5869		

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 6:21 (Parallel theme): Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.

Proverbs 3:3 (Parallel theme): Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:

Deuteronomy 11:18 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.

Proverbs 7:3 (Parallel theme): Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.

Exodus 13:9 (Parallel theme): And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt.

Exodus 13:16 (Parallel theme): And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt.

Hebrews 2:1 (Parallel theme): Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

Matthew 23:5 (Parallel theme): But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

