



## At The SHABBAT TABLE

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### Thinking Outside the Box

Have you ever wondered why, every Motzaei Shabbat, we recite a blessing over fragrant spices?

According to the deep *sefarim*, much of the Havdalah ritual that ushers us into the new week parallels, on a profound spiritual level, the very beginning of creation with Adam HaRishon. The Midrash teaches that fire itself was first created on the original Motzaei Shabbat in history, when Adam was exiled from Paradise. It is for this reason that we recite the blessing of “Borei Me’orei Ha’esh” at Havdalah.

In a similar vein, we smell *besamim* because the sense of smell occupies a unique and elevated place in human experience. The Torah describes how the first sin unfolded: Chava *saw* that the tree was desirable, she *listened* to the serpent, she *touched* the fruit, and she *tasted* it. Sight, hearing, touch, and taste were all involved. The one sense that remained untainted was smell. Because it was not corrupted by the original sin, the sense of smell retains a certain spiritual purity. We therefore engage it specifically at the transition from Shabbat into the weekday, beginning the new week with a mitzvah performed through the purest of the senses [1].

Toward the end of this week's parsha, which recounts the Exodus from Egypt, the Torah introduces the mitzvah of *tefillin*.

At first glance, an interesting discrepancy emerges. The *tefillin shel rosh* contains four separate compartments, each holding a distinct parchment with one of the four Torah passages. The *tefillin shel yad*, however, contains all four passages written on a single parchment, placed within one compartment. Why the difference?

The Eliya Rabba offers a beautiful and penetrating explanation [2]. The *tefillin shel yad* is placed upon the arm because it corresponds to the sense of touch – the sense most closely associated with the hands. Since it represents only one of the five senses, it is housed in a single compartment. The head *tefillin*, by contrast, corresponds to the remaining four senses: sight, hearing, taste, and smell, all of which are centered in the head. Accordingly, it is divided into four compartments. Through the act of wearing *tefillin*, we commit ourselves to recognizing Hashem, His kindness, and His constant providence over all creation – not with part of ourselves, but with the totality of our sensory experience.

From this emerges a powerful idea: serving Hashem is not limited to performing mitzvot in a technical sense. Rather, it is about elevating

and sanctifying the entire human experience. Every sense, every faculty, every capability we possess is meant to be directed toward the service of our Creator. We are charged not merely with living religious and meaningful lives, but with transforming physical existence itself into a vehicle for holiness.

Indeed, there is far more contained within the mitzvah of *tefillin* than initially meets the eye. The Midrash (Tanchuma 1:17) relates that the Jewish people once said to Hashem, “Our will is to be involved in Torah day and night, but we do not have the time.” G-d responded, “Place *tefillin* upon yourselves, and I will consider it as though you are engaged in Torah day and night.”

At first glance, this Midrash is puzzling. Our Sages (Eruvin 96a) clearly teach that *tefillin* is a mitzvah performed only during the daytime. How, then, can *tefillin* account for involvement in Torah both day and night?

A powerful explanation [3] resolves this difficulty. The Midrash is not suggesting that the mechanical act of wrapping leather straps and boxes alone is equivalent to constant Torah study. Rather, it is teaching that when a person dons *tefillin* with proper *kavana* – internalizing Hashem's Oneness, His intimate involvement in every detail of existence, and His providence over one's life just as He guided the Exodus from Egypt – that awareness does not dissipate when the *tefillin* are removed. It accompanies the person throughout the day and continues to shape his consciousness into the night. In that sense, the influence of *tefillin* creates a state of continuous spiritual engagement, approximating Torah involvement day and night.

In this way, *tefillin* becomes not just a mitzvah we perform, but a mindset we carry – one that trains our senses, our thoughts, and our very being to live constantly in the presence of Hashem. It can often feel compelling to naturally just go through the motions in a mindless state, but when we truly tap into the mitzvah and allow the *tefillin* to be not just something we wear but a thing that shapes our awareness, we transform a routine act into a living expression of emuna that accompanies us long after the straps are removed.

[1] Idea once heard in a d'var Torah shared by R' Shlomo Farhi

[2] Quoted in the English Yalkut Yosef volume on Hilkhos Tefillin, Preface (pg. 7)

[3] From the *sefer Iyun HaMitzvot*