

D'var Torah: Parashat Bo

by Eli Shebson - Wednesday, January 09, 2019

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This week, the Chief Rabbi explains why simply being 'Orthodox' is not enough.

Why do I place a box on my head and a box on my arm?

In Parashat Bo, the Torah presents us with two of the four paragraphs in the Torah, giving us the Mitzvah of Tefillin. "Ot Al Yadcha – Men should place a sign upon their arms." "Ul'Totafot Bein Einecha – Frontlets between our eyes." There are two prime messages that the Mitzvah of Tefillin conveys.

Firstly, the Tefillin Shel Rosh is placed on my head representing my intellect. The Tefillin Shel Yad faces the heart representing my feeling and my emotion - the extent to which I care about other people.

Therefore, every morning a man is reminded that in addition to increasing his knowledge, it is crucially important as well for him to show care and compassion for others.

In our history we have placed so much prominence on the importance of learning, knowledge, studying and educating. Our chesed and our compassion must equally find importance of place in our lives.

And then there is a second great message that the Tefillin conveys to me every single weekday morning. It is the fact that the Tefilin Shel Rosh sits on the seat of thought and intention while the Tefillin Shel Yad represents action. And here we recognise that it is not only important what I think about or what I intend to do, but far more important, is what I actually achieve.

There are many who are proud to be Orthodox but I actually think there is a far more significant term than Orthodoxy. 'Orthodox' comes from the Greek, 'Orthodoxos' – meaning thinking correctly. 'Orthoprax' means doing what is right. And surely that is one step beyond Orthodoxy. In addition to the Tefillin Shel Rosh, which represents what we think, we must also wear that Tefillin Shel Yad with pride, to translate our intentions into meaningful and effective action.

Consequently every weekday we are reminded of the importance of both knowledge and compassion, together with intention and deed.

What better way to start every day?

Shabbat Shalom