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# MEZUZAH

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One of the most common, yet profound, Jewish ritual objects is found affixed at the entrance of the Jewish home and its rooms – the mezuzah. This scroll of parchment, containing two paragraphs from the Torah, is a constant reminder of the ideals and fundamentals of Judaism.

This class will examine the following questions:

- ~ What is a mezuzah and what does it look like?
- ~ What fundamental Jewish ideas are taught by the mezuzah?
- ~ What are the rewards for keeping this mitzvah?
- ~ How does a mezuzah protect us?
- ~ How is this mitzvah fulfilled?

## Class Outline

### Section I. What is a Mezuzah?

Part A. What does a Mezuzah look like?

Part B. The Verses of the Mezuzah

### Section II. The Philosophy of the Mezuzah

Part A. The Mezuzah Contains the Fundamentals of Jewish Faith

Part B. The Priority of Leading a Meaningful Jewish Life

Part C. The Message of *Shalom Bayit*

### Section III. Benefits of the Mezuzah

Part A. Rewards for Affixing a Mezuzah

Part B. Mezuzah as Protection

Part C. The Power of the Mezuzah

### Section IV. Mitzvot Regarding the Mezuzah

Part A. The Mitzvah of Writing and Affixing the Mezuzah

Part B. How to Place the Mezuzah

Part C. When is One Obligated to Put up a Mezuzah?

Part D. Kissing the Mezuzah

Part E. Checking a Mezuzah

## SECTION I. WHAT IS A MEZUZAH?

## PART A. WHAT DOES A MEZUZAH LOOK LIKE?

וְשָׂמַעַתְּ יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֶחָד יְהוָה אֶחָד וְאַהֲבַת אֶת  
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל צַפְעֶיךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ וְהָיוּ  
 הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֶצְכִּי מִצֹּר הַיּוֹם עַל לִבְבְּךָ וּשְׁנָצְתָם  
 לְבִצִּיךָ וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבִלְכַתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ  
 וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבִקְוֹמְךָ וְקִשְׁרָתָם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפוֹת  
 בֵּינְךָ עֲצִיִּךָ וְכִתְּבָתָם עַל מַזְוֹזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ  
 וְהָיָה אִם שָׂמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ אֶל מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֶצְכִּי  
 מִצֹּר הַיּוֹם אֶתְכֶם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעֲבֹדוֹ  
 בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל צַפְעֵיכֶם וּצְוֹתַי מִטֹּר אֶרְצְכֶם בְּעָתוֹ  
 יוֹרָה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ וְאֶסְפֹּת דָּגָךְ וְתִירְשֶׁךָ וַיִּצְהָרְךָ וּצְוֹתַי  
 עָשָׂה בְּשַׁדְּךָ לְבִהְמֹתֶךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ וּשְׂבַעְתָּ הִשְׁמָרוּ לָכֵן  
 פֶּן יִפְתֶּה לְבַבְכֶם וְסָרְתָם וּעֲבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים  
 וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם וְחָזַרְהוּ אֵף יְהוָה בָּכֶם וְעָצָר אֶת  
 הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא יִהְיֶה מִטֹּר וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת יִבּוּלָהּ  
 וְאֲבָדְתֶּם מִהֲרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֶּבֶה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה צִוָּה לָכֵן  
 וּשְׂמַתֶּם אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֵלֶּה עַל לִבְבְּכֶם וְעַל צַפְעֵיכֶם וְקִשְׁרָתֶם  
 אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטְפוֹת בֵּינְךָ עֲצִיִּיכֶם וּלְמִדְּתֶם  
 אֹתָם אֶת בְּצִיִּיכֶם לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבִלְכַתְּךָ  
 בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבִקְוֹמְךָ וְכִתְּבָתָם עַל מַזְוֹזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ  
 וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם וְיָמֵי בְצִיִּיכֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה  
 אֲשֶׁר צִשְׁבַּעַת יְהוָה לְאֲבֹתֵיכֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם כִּימֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם  
 עַל הָאָרֶץ

## PART B. THE VERSES OF THE MEZUZAH

A mezuzah contains the first two paragraphs of the central creed of Judaism, the Shema:

### 1. Devarim (Deuteronomy), 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God; the Lord is One.

And you should love the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart;

and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.

And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

And you should write them upon the doorposts of your house, and upon your gates.

שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד.

וְאָהַבְתָּ, אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ, וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ.

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם – עַל-לִבְּךָ.

וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבְנֶיךָ, וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָם, בְּשֹׁכְנְךָ בֵּיתְךָ וּבִלְקַחְךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ, וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ.

וְקָשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת, עַל-יָדְךָ; וְהָיוּ לְמִטְפָּת, בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ.

וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ.

### 2. Ibid. 11:13-21

And it shall come to pass, if you shall listen diligently to My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul,

that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the early rain and the late rains, that you may gather in your corn, and your wine, and your oil.

And I will give grass in thy fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied.

Listen carefully, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;

and the anger of God will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heaven, so that there shall be no rain, and the ground shall not yield her fruit; and you will perish quickly from off the good land which God gives you.

Therefore you should place these words in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind them

וְהָיָה, אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ שְׁמִעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹתַי, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אִתְּכֶם, הַיּוֹם – לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, וּלְעֲבֹדוֹ, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם, וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם.

וְנָתַתִּי מָטָר-אַרְצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ, יוֹרֵה וּמְלָקוֹשׁ; וְאִסַּפְתָּ דָגָנְךָ, וְתִירְשֶׁךָ וְיִצְהַרְךָ.

וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשֹׁדְךָ, לְבֶהֱמֹתְךָ; וְאָכַלְתָּ, וְשִׂבַּעְתָּ.

הִשְׁמְרוּ לָכֶם, פֶּן יִפְתֶּה לְבַבְכֶם; וְסָרְתֶם, וְעַבַּדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם, לָהֶם.

וְחָרָה אַף-ה' בָּכֶם, וְעָצַר אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא-יִהְיֶה מָטָר, וְהִיאֲדָמָה, לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת-יְבוּלָהּ; וְאִבַּדְתֶּם מְהֵרָה, מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה, אֲשֶׁר ה', נָתַן לָכֶם.

וְשִׁמַּנְתֶּם אֶת-דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים, עַל-לִבְבְּכֶם וְעַל-נַפְשְׁכֶם; וְקָשַׁרְתֶּם אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְכֶם, וְהָיוּ לְמִטְפָּת בֵּין

for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

And you shall teach them to your children, talking of them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.

And you shall write them upon the door-posts of your house, and upon your gates;

So that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, upon the land which God swore to your fathers to give them, as the days of the heavens above the earth.

עֲיִיכֶם.

וְלַמֹּדֶתֶם אֹתָם אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם, לְדַבֵּר בָּם, בְּשֹׁבְתֶךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ  
וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ, וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ.

וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל-מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ.

לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם, וְיָמֵי בְנֵיכֶם, עַל הָאָדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע  
ה' לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם לָתֶת לָהֶם – בְּיָמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, עַל-הָאָרֶץ.

## SECTION II. THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE MEZUZAH

### PART A. THE MEZUZAH CONTAINS THE FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH FAITH

#### 1. Rabbeinu Bachya, Devarim 6:9 – Core principles of Jewish faith are written in the mezuzah.

You must know that many fundamentals of faith are explained to us through the mitzvah of mezuzah. The creation of the world, Divine providence and prophecy. The concepts of the unity of God and learning Torah are mentioned in the first paragraph. The truth of reward and punishment, the remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt, when many famous signs, wonders and miracles were performed, are all mentioned in the second paragraph. These fundamental principles obligate and testify about these three following fundamental principles of faith: creation, providence and prophecy ... For this reason it is called “*mezuzah*”, which has the same numerical value as God’s name *Adonai* (65). Moreover, He is called the “Guardian of Israel” and the mezuzah protects a person inside the house while God is outside it.

According to the simple explanation, the reason that we write the name “*Shadai*” on the mezuzah is because the nations of the world think that the success of a house’s [protection] is dependent upon the influence of the stars. This name conquers and overcomes any astrological portents. Therefore, it is written to remind us that all goodness flows into our homes from God, not from the stars.

וצריך אתה לדעת כי מתוך המצוה הזאת יתבארו לנו עקרי התורה באמונה: חדוש העולם, וההשגחה, והנבואה, שהרי בפרשה ראשונה נזכר ענין היחוד ותלמוד תורה, ובפרשה שניה אמתת עונש ושכר, וזכרון יציאת מצרים שבו נעשים האותות והמופתים והנסים המפורסמים מחייב העקרים האלה ומעיד על שלשה דברים הללו שהן יסוד האמונה ושרשה, והם: החדוש, וההשגחה, והנבואה.... ומטעם זה נקראת בשם “מזוזה” שהוא במספר שם אל”ף דל”ת, והוא גם כן נקרא שומר ישראל, וכן המזוזה תשמור האדם מבחוץ והוא מבפנים.

ולפי פשוטו טעם היותנו כותבין שם של שדי במזוזה לפי שהאומות חושבים שהצלחת הבתים תלויה במערכת הכוכבים, ומפני שהשם הזה משדד ומנצח המערכת, על כן נכתוב אותו לרמוז כי ממנו השפע והטוב נכנס אל הבתים לא מן המערכה.

## 2. Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, Devarim 6:9 – The mezuzah makes a spiritual impact on the thoughts and activities within the home.

That which is to be the foundation of all your thinking and doing to which you are to give over the whole of your being, and to accomplish which, you are to stake your life, to attain the knowledge of which you are to exert yourself for yourself and to hand down to your children, with which you are to occupy yourself early and late, and which is to accompany you wherever you go, and which accordingly is to make its mark on all your thoughts and doings: that is to form the inscription on the door-posts of your houses and on your gates, and thus dedicate the homes of your private and public lives to be places where all this is accomplished.

All these laws express quite definitely that, that on which the mezuzah with its contents is meant to have an effect, is, in the very first place, the minds and feelings of people who live and work in houses. “You should bind them” and “You should write them”, just as he who lays tefillin places all his thinking, desiring and doing under the dictates of the Will of God, which these tefillin contain, so does he who fixed the mezuzah on the living rooms of his house place that house, i.e. the whole active life of those that live in the house, under those same dictates. So that it is seen by him and everybody who enters his house immediately they cross the threshold as a warning and reminder, for that purpose he fixed it on his house and not on his person as if it were an amulet. Only in as far as the contents of the mezuzah achieve an effect on the minds and feelings of the household so that it does regulate their lives in consonance with those contents, can they expect protection and support in all the vicissitudes of domestic life from God, the Supreme “All-sufficing One” with which Name custom has adorned the outside of the mezuzah.

## 3. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 11:23 – Awareness of the Unity of God affects our behavior.

A person is obligated to be very careful with the mitzvah of mezuzah because it is a constant obligation. Every time he enters or leaves [his home] he sees the unity of the name of the Holy One, Blessed is He. He will remember God's love and will awaken from his sleep and his mistaken pursuit of the vanities of time. He will know that there is nothing that will last for all eternity except the knowledge of the Rock of the World. Immediately the person will return to his right mind and will follow the straight path. Our Rabbis have said that anyone who has tefillin on his head and arm, tzitzit on his clothes and a mezuzah on his door is guaranteed not to sin. For he has many reminders, and they are the angels that save him from sinning, as the verse states, “The angel of God encamps around those that fear Him and saves them” (Tehillim/Psalms 34:8).

חַיב אָדם לְהִזָּהָר מְאֹד בְּמִצְוֹת מְזוּזָה מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִיא חֹבֶת הַכָּל תָּמִיד. וְכָל זְמַן שִׁכְנָם וַיֵּצֵא, יִפְגַּע בִּיחֻד הַשֵּׁם, שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶהְבֵּתוֹ וַיַּעֲזֹר מִשְׁנֵתוֹ וּשְׂגִיּוֹתָיו בַּהֲבִלֵי הַזְּמַן, וַיֵּדַע כִּי אֵין דְּבַר הָעוֹמֵד לְעוֹלָם וּלְעוֹלָמֵי עוֹלָמִים אֵלָּא יְדִיעַת צוּר הָעוֹלָם, וּמִיָּד הוּא חוֹזֵר לְדַעְתּוֹ וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּדַרְכֵי מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל. אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוֹרֹנָם לְבִרְכָּה, כָּל מִי שִׁישׁ לוֹ תַּפְּלִין בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וּבְזֵרָעוֹ וַיֵּצִיֵּת בְּבִגְדוֹ וּמְזוּזָה בַּפֶּתַח, מַחֲזִיק הוּא שֶׁלֹּא יִחְטָא, שֶׁהָיָה יֵשׁ לוֹ מְזִכְרֵי רַבִּים וְהֵן הֵן הַמַּלְאָכִים שֶׁמְצִילִין אוֹתוֹ מִלְּחַטָּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר, חוֹנֵה מַלְאָךְ ה' סָבִיב לִירְאָיו וַיַּחֲלֹצֵם.

## PART B. THE PRIORITY OF LEADING A MEANINGFUL JEWISH LIFE

### 1. Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Mezuzah (Laws of Mezuzah) 6:13 – The mezuzah wakes us up to live a meaningful Jewish life.

A person is obligated to be careful with the mitzvah of mezuzah since it is continually incumbent upon each person. Each time that one enters and leaves [his home] he should concentrate on the Oneness of the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and remember His love, and be aroused from his sleep and his mistaken [involvement] in the meaningless use of time. And one must know that the only thing which lasts forever is the knowledge of God.

חייב אדם להזהר במזוזה מפני שהיא חובת הכל תמיד. וכל זמן שיכנס ויצא יפגע ביחוד השם שמו של הקדוש ב"ה ויזכור אהבתו ויעור משנתו ושגיותיו בהבלי הזמן. וידע שאין דבר העומד לעולם ולעולמי עולמים אלא ידיעת צור העולם.

## PART C. THE MESSAGE OF SHALOM BAYIT

As we will learn below (Section IV – B) there is a disagreement whether the mezuzah should be affixed vertically or horizontally on the doorpost. The Rema concludes that it should be placed at an angle – representing a compromise position. Rabbi Yissacher Frand shares an important message here regarding the Jewish home.

### 1. Rabbi Yissocher Frand — Ner Israel Rabbinical College, Baltimore, MD

I once heard a beautiful explanation of the symbolism of the slanting mezuzah: The mezuzah is placed on the door of the house – the house being the abode of husband and wife. The slanting mezuzah “teaches” every couple how to create “*Shalom Bayit*” – tranquillity in the home. Each one should be prepared to compromise and “bend towards the other” in helping to lead a harmonious family life.

## SECTION III. BENEFITS OF THE MEZUZAH

### PART A. REWARDS FOR AFFIXING A MEZUZAH

#### 1. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Shabbat 33b – A beautiful home.

Rav Huna said, “Someone who is careful about lighting Chanukah candles will merit having children who are Torah scholars. Someone who is careful about the mitzvah of mezuzah will merit a beautiful home. Someone who is careful about the mitzvah of tzitzit will merit a beautiful garment. Someone who is careful about the mitzvah of Kiddush will merit flasks filled with wine.”

אמר רב הונא הרגיל בנר הויין ליה בנים תלמידי חכמים הזהיר במזוזה זוכה לדירה נאה הזהיר בציצית זוכה לטלית נאה הזהיר בקידוש היום זוכה וממלא גרבי יין

#### 2. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 285:1 – A long life.

You must be very careful about the mitzvah of mezuzah. Anyone who is careful about it will

וצריך לזהר בה מאד; וכל הזהיר בה, יאריכו ימיו וימי בניו. ואם אינו זהיר בה, יתקצרו.

merit that he and his children will live long lives ... If someone is not careful about it, their days will be shortened.

## PART B. MEZUZAH AS PROTECTION

### 1. Shemot (Exodus) 12:7 and 12-13 – The protection of the mezuzah is derived from the night of Passover in Egypt.

And they shall take the blood (of the Pesach Offering) and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel upon the houses where they shall eat it.

For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt; I am the Lord.

And the blood shall be to you for a sign upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there no plague will come upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

וְלָקַחוּ, מִן-הַדָּם, וְנָתְנוּ עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת, וְעַל-הַמִּשְׁקוּף  
– עַל, הַבָּתִּים, אֲשֶׁר-יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ, בָּהֶם.

וְעָבַרְתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם, בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה, וְהָבִיתִי כָל-בְּכוֹר  
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, מֵאָדָם וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה; וּבְכָל-אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם  
אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים, אֲנִי יְהוָה.

וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם לְאֵת, עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר אֲתֶם שָׁם,  
וְרָאִיתִי אֶת-הַדָּם, וּפָסַחְתִּי עֲלֵכֶם; וְלֹא-יְהִיָּה בְּכֶם נֶגֶף  
לְמִשְׁחִית, בְּהַבְּתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

### 2. Mechilta 11 – The mezuzah protects our home; transgressions can weaken this protection.

“God passed over the doorways and did not allow the destroying angel to enter.” We can derive from here the protection offered by the mitzvah of mezuzah. If the blood of the Pesach sacrifice in Egypt, which was only placed on the doorpost for a short while, and only at night, and only in that generation, prevented the Angel of Destruction from entering – how much more so the mitzvah of mezuzah, which contains ten names of God, and applies day and night, and in every generation, does not allow the Angel of Destruction to enter.

So what does allow the Angel of Destruction to enter? Our sins. As the verse states, “Our iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good from you” (Yirmiyahu/Jeremiah 5:25). It also says, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and because of your sins He has hidden His face from you, that He will not hear” (Yeshayahu/Isaiah 59:2).

וּפָסַח ה' עַל הַפֶּתַח וְלֹא יָתֵן וְהָלַא דְּבָרִים ק"ו וּמָה אִם  
דָּם פָּסַח מִצְרַיִם הַקֵּל שְׁאִינוּ אֵלָּא לַשְּׁעָה וְאִינוּ נוֹהֵג בַּיּוֹם  
וּבַלַּיְלָה וְאִינוּ נוֹהֵג לְדוֹרוֹת נֹאמֵר בּוֹ וְלֹא יָתֵן הַמִּשְׁחִית  
מְזוּזָה שֶׁהִיא חֲמוּרָה שִׁישׁ בָּהּ עֲשָׂרָה שְׁמוֹת מִיּוֹחַדִּין  
וְנוֹהֶגֶת בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וְנוֹהֶגֶת לְדוֹרוֹת עַל אַחַת כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה  
שֶׁלֹּא יָתֵן הַמִּשְׁחִית

אֵלָּא מִי גָרַם עוֹנוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנֹּאמַר עוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם הִטּוּ אֱלֹה וְגו'  
(ירמיה ה כה) וְכָתִיב כִּי אִם עוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם הָיוּ מִבְּדִילִים  
בֵּינוֹכֶם וּבֵין אֱלֹקֵיכֶם וְחַטָּאוֹתֵיכֶם הִסְתִּירוּ פָנִים מִכֶּם  
מִשְׁמוּעַ (ישעיה נט ב).



### 3. Talmud Bavli, Menachot 33b – Divine protection of our homes.

Rava said that it is a mitzvah to place the mezuzah within a *tefach* of the outside. What is the reason? The Rabbis say so that you will see the mezuzah as soon as you enter. Rav Chanina from Sura says so that it can protect you. Rav Chanina said, "Come and see that God does not behave like a person. For [in the case of] people the King sits inside and the people guard him from the outside. However, in the case of God, His servants sit inside and He guards them from the outside, as the verse states, "God will protect you, God will be the shadow of your right hand" (Tehillim 121:5).

אמר רבא: מצוה להניחה בטפח הסמוך לר"ר. מאי טעמא? רבנן אמרי: כדי שיפגע במזוזה מיד, רב חנינא מסורא אומר: כי היכי דתינטריה. אמר רבי חנינא: בוא וראה שלא כמדת הקב"ה מדת בשר ודם, מדת בשר ודם - מלך יושב מבפנים ועם משמרין אותו מבחוץ, מדת הקב"ה אינו כן, עבדיו יושבין מבפנים והוא משמרין מבחוץ, שנאמר: ה' שומרך ה' צלך על יד ימינך (תהלים קכ"א)

### 4. Rashi, Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 4a – Who is responsible for acquiring the mezuzah, a tenant or the homeowner?

The mezuzah is an obligation on the person living in the house [as opposed to the homeowner] – because it protects him.

חובת הדר - לפי שהיא משמרתו.

### 5. Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), Peah 1:1 – The difference between a priceless jewel and a mezuzah.

The Parthian king, Artaban, once sent a priceless jewel to Rabbeinu HaKadosh (Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi/Rebbi). He asked that he send him something in return. Rebbi sent him a mezuzah. The king said, "I sent you something priceless, and you sent me something that can be bought for a paltry sum." Rebbi answered, "You sent me something that I must watch over, however, I have sent you something that will watch over you."

ארטבון שלח לר' הקדוש חד מרגלי טבא אטימיטון א"ל שלח לי מילה דטבא דכוותה שלח ליה חד מזוזה א"ל מה אנא שלחי לך מילה דלית לה טימי ואת שלחת לי מילה דטבא חד פולר א"ל חפצך וחפצי לא ישווה בה ולא עוד אלא דאת שלחית לי מילה דאנא מנטיר לה ואנא שלחי לך מילה דאת דמך לך והיא מנטרא לך דכתיב (משלי ו) בהתהלך תנחה אותך וגו'.

The following two sources from the Zohar also relate the protective nature of the mezuzah.

### 6. Zohar 3: 300b

"Mezuzot" is comprised of the letters "zaz mavet" (move death) because it ensures that the destroyer will have no permission to attack, and will leave the doorway.

מזוזות אותיות ז"ז מו"ת שלא נתן רשות למשחית לחבל וזו מפתחו.

### 7. Ibid, Rut 103b

A doorway which has a mezuzah ... prevents any bad thing coming near to it.

פתח המצויין במזוזה... ואין פגע רע מתקרב אליו



## PART C. THE POWER OF THE MEZUZAH

1. **Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 11b – Although Judaism does not proactively seek converts, the message of the mezuzah inspired a brigade of Roman soldiers to become Jewish.**

Onkelos, ben Kalonimus, converted to Judaism. Titus Caesar sent a brigade of soldiers to bring him back to Rome. But when Onkelos engaged the soldiers in discussion and showed them the beauty of Torah, they converted to Judaism. Titus then sent another brigade, instructing them not to speak to Onkelos. But after they listened to what he had to say without him even speaking to them, they too converted to Judaism. Finally, Titus sent a third brigade and instructed them not even to listen to Onkelos. When they were leading him away, he placed his hand on the mezuzah and inquisitively asked, "What is this?" "You tell us," the soldiers said. He replied, "Normally, a human king sits inside and his servants stand outside and guard him. But, the Holy One Blessed be He, His servants are inside and He guards them from the outside, as the verse says, 'God will guard your going out and coming in from now and forever (Tehillim 121).' They too converted. Titus did not send any more soldiers.

אונקלוס בר קלונימוס איגייר. שדר קיסר גונדא דרומא אבתריה, משכינהו בקראי, איגור. הדר שדר גונדא דרומא [אחרינא] אבתריה, אמר להו: לא תימרו ליה ולא מידי. כי הוו שקלו ואזלו, אמר להו, אימא לכו מילתא בעלמא: ניפירא נקט נורא קמי פיפירא, פיפירא לדוכסא, דוכסא להגמונא, הגמונא לקומא, קומא מי נקט נורא מקמי אינשי? אמרי ליה: לא. אמר להו: הקב"ה נקט נורא קמי ישראל, דכתיב: (שמות יג) וה' הולך לפניהם יומם וגו', איגור [כולהו]. הדר שדר גונדא אחרינא אבתריה, אמר להו: לא תשתעו מידי בהדיה. כי נקטי ליה ואזלי, חזא מזוזתא [דמנחא אפתחא], אותיב ידיה עלה ואמר להו: מאי האי? אמרו ליה: אימא לן את. אמר להו: מנהגו של עולם, מלך בשר ודם יושב מבפנים ועבדיו משמרים אותו מבחוץ, ואילו הקב"ה, עבדיו מבפנים והוא משמרן מבחוץ, שנאמר: (תהלים קכא) ה' ישמר צאתך ובואך מעתה ועד עולם, איגור. תו לא שדר בתריה

## SECTION IV. MITZVOT REGARDING THE MEZUZAH

### PART A. THE MITZVAH OF WRITING AND AFFIXING THE MEZUZAH

1. **Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 285:1 – The mezuzah parchment consists of the two written paragraphs of the Shema, as discussed in Section I.B.**

It is a positive commandment to write "Shema" and "It shall be when you listen" and to affix them on the doorposts of the house.

מצות עשה לכתוב פ' שמע (דברים ו, ד - ט) והיה אם שמוע (דברים יא, יג - כא) ולקבעם על מזוזת הפתח.

2. **Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 11:1 – Multiple rooms.**

It is a positive mitzvah to affix a mezuzah on every doorway. Even if a person has many rooms and each room has many doorways for entering and exiting, and even if the person normally only uses one of them, nevertheless all the doorways require a mezuzah. Even if only a few people live there and they only need one doorway, nevertheless all the doorways require mezuzahs.

מצות עשה לקבע מזוזת בכל פתח. ואפלו יש לו כמה חדרים ולכל חדר כמה פתחים העשויים לכניסה ויציאה, אף על פי שהוא רגיל רק באחד מהם, מכל מקום כולם חייבים במזוזת. ואפלו אם נתמעטו הדיורים ואינו צריך עתה רק לפתח אחד, מכל מקום כולם חייבים.

### 3. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 11b – Who must affix a mezuzah?

The Rabbis taught: “A prayer-house, a house belonging to a woman, and one belonging to two partners, must have a mezuzah.” Is this not self-evident? One might think, because it is written “in your house,” but not “in her house” or “in their house,” these people are exempt. This comes to teach us that this is not so. But from where do we deduce that it is not so? It is written, “In order that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children” [since it causes a long life women and partners should be included] (Devarim 11. 21). Why, then, is it written “your house” (*betcha*)? Rabba explained, “It should be understood as the way in which you enter (*biathcha*); just as one enters the house with the right foot, [so too the mezuzah should be on the right side of the entrance.]”

ת"ר בית הכנסת ובית האשה ובית השותפין חייבת במזוזה פשיטא מהו דתימא ביתך ולא ביתה ביתך ולא בתייהם קמשמע לן ואימא הכי נמי אמר קרא (דברים יא) למען ירבו ימיכם וימי בניכם הני בעו חיי והני לא בעו חיי אלא ביתך למה לי כדרבא דאמר רבא דרך ביאתך וכי עקר איניש כרעיה דימינא עקר ברישא.

### 4. Rambam, Hilchot Tefillin and Mezuzah 5:4 – A great mitzvah, not a “good luck” charm.

A prevalent custom is that we write the name “*Shadai*” on the outside of the mezuzah opposite the gap between the two paragraphs. There is nothing wrong with doing this, since it is on the outside of the mezuzah.

But those who write names of angels or holy names, or verses, or signs on the inside, are included in those who have no share in the World to Come. For those fools not only do away with the mitzvah, but they take a great mitzvah, which contains the unity of God’s name and the concepts of loving and serving Him, and they make it into a good luck charm for their own benefit, based on whatever foolishness enters their hearts that they think will help them with the futilities of the world.

מנהג פשוט, שכותבין על המזוזה מבחוץ, כנגד הרייח שבין פרשה לפרשה, שדי; ואין בזה הפסד, לפי שהוא מבחוץ.

אבל אלו שכותבין בה מבפנים שמות מלאכים, או שמות קדושים, או פסוק, או חותמות – הרי הן בכלל מי שאין להן חלק לעולם הבא: שאלו הטיפשים, לא די להם שביטלו המצוה; אלא שעושין מצוה גדולה, שהיא ייחוד שמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ואהבתו ועבודתו, כאילו היא קמיע להניית עצמן, כמו שעלה על ליבם הסכל שזה דבר המהנה בהבלי העולם.

## PART B. HOW TO PLACE THE MEZUZAH

The Talmud discusses the mezuzah being affixed to the doorpost in directions described as a “bolt” or an “ankle,” which will be defined by the next few sources.

### 1. Talmud Bavli, Menachot 33a – The Talmud uses the term, “nagar” (bolt) for a mezuzah placed on the doorpost in a direction which in one case is understood to be kosher, and in a second case is not. A mezuzah placed like a “peg” is not considered kosher; when placed as an “ankle” it is considered kosher.

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: If someone made it [a mezuzah] like a bolt it is



אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: עשאה כמין נגר – פסולה. איני? והא כי אתא רב יצחק בר יוסף אמר: כולהו

not kosher. Is that so? But when Rav Yitzchak bar Yosef came he said that all the mezuzot of the house of Rabbi were made like a kind of bolt, and the doorway through which he came into the Study Hall did not have a mezuzah at all! This is not a contradiction. The first case refers to when it was made like a peg, whereas the second case refers to when it was made like an ankle.

מזוזתא דבי רבי כמין נגר הוו עבדין, וההיא פיתחא דעייל ביה רבי לבי מדרשא לא הוה לה מזוזה! לא קשיא: הא דעבידא כסיכתא, הא דעבידא כאסתורא.

Rashi and Tosefot disagree on the correct direction of placement on the doorpost.

2. **Rashi, Ibid. – When the “nagar” (bolt) refers to placement like a peg, horizontally, the mezuzah is not kosher. When it is placed vertically, like an “ankle,” it is kosher.**

If he made it like a bolt: If he fixed it to the doorpost (horizontally) like the way carpenters put nails in the wall, like this . It is not kosher, because the mitzvah is to put in along the length of the doorpost (vertically) like this .

עשאה כמין נגר - שקבעה ותחבה בסף כנגר שתוחבין הנגרין בכותל כזה.  
פסולה - דמצות' לתתה באורך בסף כזה.

3. **Tosefot, Ibid, s.v. ha de-avida – How can vertical placement be kosher (as Rashi maintains), since this is not considered respectful?**

The first case refers to when it [the mezuzah] was made like a peg, whereas this case refers to when it was made like an ankle: This is difficult for Rabbeinu Tam to understand because to place something upright is disrespectful ... We find that the Torah and the Tablets in the Ark were lying down, and were not upright ... even though there was room for them to be put upright, because the Ark was the same height as its width ... Therefore, it seems to Rabbeinu Tam that “like a peg” means like the pegs of the Tabernacle, which were stuck into the ground vertically — and this is not kosher. Like an ankle, which is where the leg becomes horizontal, is kosher.

הא דעבידא כסיכתא הא דעבידא כאסתורא - וקשיא לר"ת דמעומד לאו דרך כבוד הוא ... וספר תורה ולוחות שבארון מושכב ולא מעומד ... אע"פ שהיו יכולין להניחו מעומד דארון רומו כרחבו ... וע"כ פר"ת כי סיכתא מעומד כיתדות המשכן הנועצות בארץ פסולה כאסתורא הנתון בשוק לרחבה בלע"ז קבילי"א כשרה.

4. **Shulchan Aruch and Rema, Yoreh Deah 289:6 – The Shulchan Aruch posits like Rashi that the mezuzah should be placed vertically. The Rema is concerned for the opinion of Tosefot, and concludes that the mezuzah should be placed at an angle, fulfilling both opinions. (See Section II. C. above)**

The mezuzah must be upright, along the height of the doorpost. The word “Shema” should be at the end of the rolled mezuzah so that it is closest to the outside.

צריכה להיות זקופה, ארכה לאורך מזוזת הפתח, ויכוין שיהא שמע (דברים ו, ד) דהיינו סוף הגלילה, לצד חוץ. הגה: וכן נהגו (ב"י). אבל י"א שפסולה בזקופה,

Rema: This is the custom. However, some say that it is not kosher if it is upright, but it should be horizontal, across the width of the doorpost. Those who are particularly careful fulfill both opinions and place it at an angle. This is the correct thing to do, and this is the custom in our countries. You should align it so that the top of the mezuzah, where the word “Shema” is written, should be facing inwards, and the last line should face outwards.

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אלא צריכה להיות שכובה, ארכה לרוחב מזוזת הפתח (טור והפוסקים בשם ר"ת). והמדקדקין, יוצאין ידי שניהם, ומניחים אותה בשפוע ובאלכסון (טור והגהות מיימוני ומהרי"ל ות"ה סי' נ"ב), וכן ראוי לנהוג, וכן נוהגין במדינות אלו. וכיון שיהא ראש המזוזה, דהיינו שמע (דברים ו, ד) לצד פנים, ושיטה אחרונה לצד חוץ.

## PART C. WHEN IS ONE OBLIGATED TO PUT UP A MEZUZAH?

### 1. **Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 286:22 – When to affix a mezuzah inside and outside the Land of Israel.**

Someone who rents a house outside the Land of Israel or who stays in a hotel in the Land of Israel is exempt from the mitzvah of mezuzah for the first thirty days. Someone who rents a house in the Land of Israel is obligated to put up a mezuzah immediately because of the mitzvah of settling the Land.

השוכר בית בחוצה לארץ והדר בפונדק בארץ ישראל, פטור ממזוזה שלשים יום. והשוכר בית בארץ ישראל, חייב במזוזה מיד, משום ישוב ארץ ישראל.

### 2. **Gilyon Maharsha, Yoreh Deah 286:22 – Owning a home outside of the Land of Israel.**

This implies that someone who purchases a house outside the Land of Israel is obligated immediately.

משמע דאם הבית שלו חייב מיד.

## PART D. KISSING THE MEZUZAH.

### 1. Rema, Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 285:2

Rema: Some say that when you leave the house you should place your hand on the mezuzah and say "God guard my going out etc.". Similarly when entering you should place your hand on the mezuzah.

הגה: י"א כשאדם יוצא מן הבית יניח ידו על המזוזה (מהרי"ל שם ומוכח בעבודת כוכבים דף י"א), ויאמר: ה' ישמר צאתי וכו' (במדרש). וכן כשיכנס אדם לבית, יניח ידו על המזוזה.

## PART E. CHECKING A MEZUZAH

### 1. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 11a

A mezuzah of an individual must be examined [to see whether it is valid] twice in seven years and one of a congregation, twice in fifty years.

דתניא מזוזות יחיד נבדקת פעמים בשבוע ושל רבים פעמים ביובל.

This class was prepared by Rabbi David Sedley  
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