



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. The Right Guard
2. Holy Rollers
3. Yiddle Riddle



Guy <guy@easynet.co.uk> wrote:

Hi I am a university student researching the mezuzah; can you please send me information on its history, and its potential use as an amulet. Thanks

Dear Guy,

When you ask about the *history* of the mezuzah, are you asking about its origin? If so, the answer is that the mezuzah has the same origin as all the commandments in the Torah: They were revealed by Hashem to the Jewish People at Mount Sinai.

Interestingly, though, the mezuzah was soon singled out for criticism by a group of people rebelling against Moshe. "If a room is filled with holy books," they asked, "does it still need a mezuzah on its door?!" They were basically trying to ridicule Moses, but their point was this: Does the 'House of Israel' (the holy Jewish People) need a 'mezuzah' — i.e., a leader or priest who adds to their holiness?

The answer to them was simple: Everything Moses did, whether appointing priests or affixing *mezuzot*, was commanded by Hashem. That answers your question as well.

The mitzva of mezuzah is to write two paragraphs from the Torah — "*Shema*" and "*V'haya*" — and affix them to the door-post of all gates, houses and rooms. Among other things, these two paragraphs state that Hashem is One, and that we should take the Torah's words to heart and teach them to our children.

Wearing the mezuzah as an amulet stems from ignorance. One negative outcome of this practice is the desecration that occurs when, for instance, someone walks into the bathroom wearing a mezuzah.

Fortunately, what is often worn around the neck and called a mezuzah isn't really one, but simply a decorative case like those used to cover real *mezuzot*.

However, placing a valid mezuzah on your door-post in fulfillment of the mitzva earns special protection from Hashem for you and for your children. This idea is related by the Talmud in the following most unusual episode:

Onkelos, the brilliant nephew of the Roman Emperor Titus, converted to Judaism and became a disciple of the Sages. Hearing this, Titus 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 with the same result: They too converted to Judaism.

Finally Titus sent a third brigade and instructed them not even to listen to Onkelos. When they were leading Onkelos away, Onkelos placed his hand on the mezuzah and said, "What is that?"

"You tell us," the soldiers said.

"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 outside."

They too converted. Titus sent no more soldiers.

Sources:

- Deuteronomy 6,9
- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 284
- Tractate Avodah Zarah 11

Andrew V. Ettin <ettinav@wfu.edu> wrote:

Many ornamental mezuzot are displayed with the scroll text exposed and facing outward. First, is this halachically acceptable? Second, won't this hasten the deterioration of the lettering, necessitating more frequent replacement?

Dear Andrew Ettin,

The mezuzah must be rolled with the writing facing inward. A mezuzah rolled the other way, with the writing exposed, is halachically unacceptable.

Your second concern is also essentially correct, because the mezuzah contains Hashem's name, and it's a Torah prohibition to erase Hashem's name.

There's a custom to write the name of Hashem on the back of the mezuzah. Since this is visible when the mezuzah is rolled up, therefore the mezuzah should be covered. Otherwise, over years and years of people touching the mezuzah, this name of Hashem will get erased little by little.

Source:

- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 288:14,15
- Tractate Menachot 31b

Yiddle Riddle:

"I've always been healthy and a I'm a first born male, my parents are observant Jews yet I'm exempt from circumcision. Who am I?"

(Riddle concept: Eli Weisz from Zurich)
Answer next week!

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