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Sincerely,

Rabbi Yehoshua Werde
Director

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ב"ה



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Mezuzah

Introduction

Since the Yetzias Mitzrayim, a mysterious sign on Jewish doorposts has been instrumental in protecting the Jewish nation from harm. What is the nature of this charm?

In this session, we will question the mystical root of all evil as we explore three functions of the mezuzah and the protection it brings.

Biblical Source

Devarim 6:6-9

The mitzvah of mezuzah appears in the Torah in the first paragraph of Shema:

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבְךָ...וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ.

And these words which I instruct you today, shall be upon your heart....and you shall write them upon the doorposts [mezuzos] of your house, and upon your gates.

It is therefore a mitzvah to write “these words”—i.e., the first two paragraphs of Shema—and place them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates. This is codified in Shulchan Aruch:

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 285:1

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

It is a positive command to write the paragraphs beginning with “Shema” (Devarim 6:4-9) and “Vahaya im shamo” (Devarim 11:13-21) and to affix them upon the doorpost.

Basic Laws of Mezuzah

Any room (besides for a toilet or bathroom) that has an area of 4x4 cubits (approx. 2x2 meters) and has a doorway (i.e., two doorposts and a lintel connecting the doorposts at the top) requires a mezuzah. If there is a doubt whether a room or doorway meets these criteria, a rabbi should be consulted.

Where on the doorpost does one affix the mezuzah? The Talmud derives this from the aforementioned verse:

Talmud, Yoma 11b

ביתך למה לי כדרבא דאמר רבא דרך ביאתך וכי עקר איניש כרעיה
דימינא עקר ברישא.

[The verse could have stated that “houses require a mezuzah,”] why do I need the verse to say “your house?” For Rava said: [“your house” - “beischa” could be read “biascha”] “the way you enter” and when a man lifts his feet [to enter a house] he lifts his right foot first [indicating that the mezuzah must be placed on the right side of the doorway].

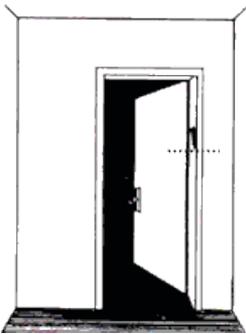
Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040–1105) adds in his commentary to the Talmud that this means specifically on the right side as the person enters the doorway, not as he exits it.

דרך ביאתך. לימין בבואו לבית ולא מימין לצאתו.

“The way you enter” on the right as you enter the house, and not on the right as you exit it.

It is fairly simple to determine the direction of entry and exit for a front door, however, inside the house things can get a little more complicated. For example, when you have a doorway that connects two equally important rooms, it can be unclear which direction is the entrance and which is the exit. In most cases, how the door opens can help us figure out the direction of the entrance. Because a mezuzah placed on the wrong side of the doorway doesn't count, a rabbi should be consulted whenever there is a question about where to place the mezuzah.

At what height is the mezuzah placed?



Talmud, Menachot 33a

מצוה להניחה בתחלת שליש העליון...
וקשרתם וכתבתם מה קשירה בגובה אף
כתיבה בגובה

The mitzvah is to place it at the beginning of the top third [of the doorway]... The posuk (Devarim 6:8-9) states “and you shall bind them

[tefillin]...and you shall write them [as mezuzos]” just as the binding [of tefillin] is at the top [i.e., on the head] so too is the writing [of the mezuzah] to

be placed at the top [of the doorpost].

The verse mentions the mitzvot of tefillin and mezuzah together, teaching us that just as the tefillin is placed at the top (on one's head) similarly the mezuzah should be placed on the top (in the top third) of the doorpost.

If the mezuzah was placed lower than the top third it is invalid, unless it is a very high doorway and nobody will be able to reach the mezuzah if it were placed in the top third, in such an instance, the mezuzah is placed at near shoulder height.

Should the mezuzah be placed vertically or horizontally?

Talmud, Ibid

עשאה כמין נגר פסולה... הא דעבידא כסיכתא.

If one made the mezuzah [i.e., affixed it to the doorpost] as a bolt it is invalid...this refers to where it was made like a peg.

The Talmud teaches us that if it was inserted into the wall “like a bolt it is invalid,” and it clarifies that “like a bolt” means “like a peg.”

The problem is that the Talmud still has not helped us clarify whether the mezuzah is placed vertically or horizontally, for a peg can be placed both vertically and horizontally.

Rashi maintains that a bolt and peg is placed horizontally into a wall, thus a mezuzah is required to stand vertically along the height of the doorway and if it were placed horizontally it would be invalid.

Rabbeinu Tam (Rashi's grandson, Rabbi Yaakov ben Meir 1100–1171) disagrees with his grandfather and maintains that making the mezuzah stand upright is considered disrespectful to the mezuzah as the Luchos were placed to rest horizontally in the Aron (to show them respect that they are not made to stand up). He therefore understands that “made like a peg” refers, not to pegs placed into a wall, but to the pegs of the Mishkan that were pegged into the ground and stood vertically which means the mezuzah should be placed horizontally. Thus, according to Rabbeinu Tam, if you placed the mezuzah vertically it would be considered invalid.

How do we resolve this dispute between Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam? If we place the mezuzah vertically, it would be invalid according to Rabbeinu Tam, and if we place it horizontally, it would be invalid according to Rashi?!

To resolve this dispute, Tosafos cites a statement of the Talmud that a mezuzah placed “like an ankle” (i.e., when the mezuzah is bent like a joint and one end is vertical while the other is horizontal) is indeed kosher.

Tosafos, Ibid, Ha D'Avida

הלכך נראה בין לפי הקונטרס בין לפי ר"ת דכאיסתוריא דכשירה
היינו באלכסון לא שוכב ולא זקוף.

Therefore, it appears that both according to Rashi and according to Rabbeinu Tam if it were placed “like an ankle” which would be kosher, means on a slant, not resting and not upright.

This is why we affix our mezuzot on a slant in a manner that satisfies both opinions.

There is a powerful message to the mezuzah being placed at a slant at the entrance to a Jewish home. It teaches us that when you enter the home you must be willing to compromise. This doesn't mean that you should be completely horizontal, allowing your spouse to walk all over you. Nor does it mean you should stand completely upright and never concede. Instead, you should be at a slant, upright when necessary, and ready to compromise when the situation requires it.

A Unique Mitzvah

After mentioning what the mitzvah of mezuzah is, the Shulchan Aruch adds:

Shulchan Aruch, Ibid

וצריך לזהר בה מאד

One must be very careful about this [mitzvah]

What makes the mitzvah of mezuzah unusual that one should be more careful about it than other mitzvos?

Rabeinu Bachya (1255-1340) explains that this mitzvah is unique because of the content written inside of the mezuzah:

Rabeinu Bachya, Deuteronomy 6:9

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.

Know that many fundamentals of faith are explained to us through this mitzvah. The creation of the world, Divine providence, prophecy, and the concept of Hashem's unity and of Torah study are mentioned in the first paragraph. And the truth of reward and punishment, the remembrance of Yetzias Mitzrayim when many famous signs, wonders, and miracles were performed, are in the second paragraph.

These fundamental principles obligate and testify about these three fundamental principles of faith: creation, providence, and prophecy.

Eidus: Symbolic Testament

Mezuzah is a mitzvah that belongs to the category of mitzvos called eidus—symbolic mitzvos. There are mishpatim—rational laws (like “do not kill” and “do not steal”), chukim—mitzvos that we are not privy to their reasoning (for instance, not cooking milk and meat together), and eidus (testimonial)—mitzvos that are symbolic to remind us of important articles of faith and practice. The mezuzah serves as a reminder to us of our faith in Hashem which is the subject of the words of the Shema that are written inside.

The Shulchan Aruch instructs us to pay special attention to the mitzvah of mezuzah, because it attests to the basic principles of our faith.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Ramban (1192-1270), likens the act of placing a mezuzah

on your doorpost to attesting your faith in Hashem. This is similar, in concept, to displaying a national flag in front of your home as a pledge of allegiance to the country in which you live:

Ramban, Shemos 13:16

הקונה מזוזה בזוז אחד וקבעה בפתחו ונתכוון בענינה כבר הודה
בחדוש העולם ובידיעת הבורא והשגחתו, וגם בנבואה, והאמין בכל
פנות התורה.

One who buys a mezuzah for a zuz and affixes it on his doorway with the intent of the mitzvah—he has acknowledged the creation of the world, Hashem’s knowledge and providential governance, as well as prophecy and the belief in all aspects of the Torah.

A Perpetual Reminder

The Chinuch (13th century) describes the function of the mezuzah as a perpetual reminder of Hashem’s presence when we enter and leave the home (similar, in concept, to a post-it note we might place on our desk, the fridge, or somewhere prominent that we would notice in order not to forget an important detail).

Chinuch, Mitzvah 423

משרשי המצוה להיות זכרון לאדם באמונת השם בכל עת בואו לביתו
וצאתו.

One of the roots of this mitzvah is to remind the person at every moment of faith in Hashem, whenever he enters his home or leaves it.

The Rambam (1135-1204) describes how the mezuzah serves as such a reminder:

Rambam, Hilchos Mezuzah 6:13

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.

[Through its observance,] whenever a person enters or leaves [the house], he will encounter the unity of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and remember his love for Him. Thus, he will awake from his sleep and his obsession with the vanities of time, and recognize that there is nothing which lasts for eternity except the knowledge of the Creator of the world.

A Mishkan for Hashem in the Home

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsh (1808–1888) was appointed as a Rabbi in Germany around the time when the enlightenment swept the Jewish world. He is known for providing rational explanations for basic Jewish practices. He explains that the mezuzah attests to the fact that our home houses the Shechinah, similar to a door sign that lets you know the name of the family that lives in the home.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsh, Chorev Ch. 40

The Biblical passages “Shema” and “Vehayah” should be written upon the entrance of every house, thereby hallowing the house (and indeed every

place specially set aside for human activities) as an abode where Hashem is ever present and where the service of Hashem is fulfilled.

The Frierdiker Rebbe explains that the mezuzah transforms the home into a vessel for the Divine, into a place in which Hashem's presence dwells:

Sefer Hama'amarim 5698, V'atah Berachamechah

במצות מזוזה שכותבים ב' פרשיות דקריאת שמע וקובעים אותם במזוזות הפתח דבא להודיע דהבית וכל אשר בתוכו הוא כלי לאלקות.

For the mitzvah of mezuzah one writes two paragraphs of the Shema and affixes them upon one's doorpost—this makes known that the house, and everything therein, is a vessel for Elokus.

A Promise of Longevity

We've seen several symbolism's of the mezuzah, as a pledge of allegiance to Hashem, as a reminder of Hashem's presence, and to attest to the fact that the house belongs to Hashem. But what is the source for the mezuzah serving as a protective device?

The verse states concerning the mitzvah of mezuzah:

Devarim 11:20-21

וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל-מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ. לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם, וַיְמֵי בְנֵיכֶם...
You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

In order that your days and the days of your children shall be lengthened...

The Posuk says that you should perform the mitzvah of mezuzah “in order that your days...be lengthened.” This means that the purpose of the mezuzah is to save one from harm and lengthen their days. If no harm befalls you, you will end up living a long life.

It is clear from the following sources that the protective properties of the mezuzah are more than just a reward for the performance of a mitzvah. Our sages understood the mezuzah to serve as an amulet of sorts that is meant to protect us from harm.

A Protective Device

The Talmud Yerushalmi tells of Artabanus V King of Parthia (ruled circa. 216–224 CE) who exchanged gifts with Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi (circa. 135—217 CE):

Talmud Yerushalmi, Pe'ah, 15d



Artabanus V (216-224)

ארטבן שלח לרבינו הקדוש חד מרגלי טבא אטימיטון אמר ליה שלח לי מילה דטבה דכוותה שלח ליה חד מזוזה אמר ליה מה אנא שלחית לך מילה דלית לה טימי ואת שלחת לי מילה דטבא חד פולר אמר ליה חפציך וחפצי לא ישוו בה ולא עוד אלא דאת שלחת לי מילה דאנא מנטר לה ואנא שלחית לך מילה דאת דמך לך

והיא מנטרה לך דכתיב בהתהלכך תנחה אותך.

Artabanus sent our Rabi Yehudah Hanasi a precious gem of inestimable value.

He said to him: "Send me something equally precious."

He sent him a mezuzah.

[Artabanus] said to him: "I sent you something that is beyond price and you sent me something worth a coin!"

[Rabbi Yehudah replied:] "Nothing you or I have can compare to it. Moreover, you sent me something that I must guard, whereas I sent you something that will guard you even when you sleep; as the posuk states: "when you go about your business it will guide you, [and when you lie down it will protect you]..."

In days gone by, it was common for people to hang all sorts of omens on necklaces, or above their doorposts for protection. The purpose of these devices was to keep out any harmful spirits or demons. These devices were called "prophylactic devices" (tefillin are called phylacteries, which means devices that protect).

Is the mezuzah just another amulet?

How does the protective power of the mezuzah work?

The Bach in his commentary to the Tur describes the

protective properties of the mezuzah as being more than just a reward for fulfilling a mitzvah:

Bayis Chadash, Tur Yoreh De'ah, 385

איכא הנאה וריוח מגוף המצוה עצמה שהבית נשמר על ידה וזה נוסף לו על השכר שיתן לו הקב"ה על קיום המצוה כמו שנותן שכר על כל שאר קיום מצותיו.

There is a benefit and gain from the physical mitzvah itself, for the house is safeguarded because of it. This is in addition to the reward that Hashem will give for observing the mitzvah, like the reward for the observance of all other mitzvos.

We even find reference to the mezuzah's protective powers in the Mishnah, where it describes various types of utensils, and tells of a walking stick that had a hole hollowed out inside of it to hold a mezuzah:

Mishnah, Keilim 17:16

מקל שיש בו בית קבול מזוזה

A staff which has a hollowed-out spot for holding a mezuzah (is susceptible to impurity).

The Mishnah appears to describe a staff that doubles as a mezuzah case.

Why might people carry a mezuzah in a staff?

One of the more conventional explanations is that people would carry around mezuzos in their walking sticks for the sake of protection.

Another mention of mezuzos being used for protection outside of their ordinary function to be affixed to the doorway for the mitzvah we find in reference to Monobaz II (Cir. 55 CE) King of Adiabene (Armenia) who, shortly before the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash in 70 CE, converted to Yiddishkeit together with his mother, Queen Helena and their entire kingdom. The Talmud tells of the house of Monobaz:

Talmud, Menachos 32b

תלאה במקל... של בית מונבז המלך היו עושין בפונדקותיהן כן, זכר
למזוזה

If one suspended it [the mezuzah] from a staff... In the house of King Monobaz, they would [suspend mezuzos from a staff, instead of being affixed to the doorway] in the guest rooms, as a reminder of the [mitzvah of] mezuzah.

Unless you're staying for an extended period of time, you are not required to put up a mezuzah for a short hotel stay. The house of Monobaz nevertheless brought mezuzot with them for protection.

We see that the mezuzah has the power to protect even when it is not affixed to the doorpost and is not being used for the mitzvah.

The Rebbe instructed several people to keep mezuzos by their bedside when they were in hospital and to take one with them when they flew in an airplane. In fact, it is known that the Chabad Rebbeim would keep a mezuzah on their desks at all times.

The earliest source for a mezuzah serving as a protective device comes from the story of Yetizas Mitzrayim, when the Yidden were instructed to place blood from the Korban Pesach on the doorpost to spare Jewish firstborns from the plague that struck the Egyptian homes.

Sign Upon the Doorpost

Shemos, 12:7, 12-13

וְלָקְחוּ, מִן הַדָּם וְנָתְנוּ עַל שְׁתֵי הַמְּזוּזוֹת וְעַל הַמַּשְׁקוּף עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ בָּהֶם. וְעִבְרָתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּלִילָה הַזֶּה וְהִכִּיתִי כָל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם וְעַד בְּהֵמָה וּבְכֹל אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֲעִשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים אֲנִי יְקוּק. וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם לְאֹת עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם שָׂם וְרָאִיתִי אֶת הַדָּם וּפְסַחְתִּי עֲלֵכֶם וְלֹא יִהְיֶה בְכֶם נֶגֶף לְמִשְׁחִית בְּהַכְתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

They will take from the blood and put it onto the two doorposts and onto the lintel on the houses in which they will eat it.

I will pass through the land of Mitzrayim this night and I will strike down the first-born in the land of Mitzrayim, from man to animal, and I will execute judgment on all the gods of Mitzrayim; I am Hashem.

The blood will be a sign for Me on the houses in which you are; I will see the blood and I will pass over you and there will be no destroying plague among you when I strike down the land of Mitzrayim.

This episode is the source for the name “Pesach,” because Hashem was “pasach” —“passed over” the Jewish homes that had lamb’s blood on the doorpost and the inhabitants of the home were protected from harm.

From this episode, the Midrash deduces the protective power of the mezuzah.

Mechilta of Rabbi Yishmael, Pesach, Bo 11

והלא דברים ק”ו ומה אם דם פסח מצרים הקל שאינו אלא לשעה ואינו נוהג ביום ובלילה ואינו נוהג לדורות נאמר בו ולא יתן המשחית מזוזה שהיא חמורה שיש בה עשרה שמות מיוחדין ונוהגת ביום ובלילה ונוהגת לדורות על אחת כמה וכמה שלא יתן המשחית

Is this not a case of a kal vachomer? If the blood of the Korban Pesach in Mitzrayim which is a weaker mitzvah—since it was temporary, and does not apply both by day and by night, and it was not to be observed by future generations—yet it still says [that due to its observance], “He will not allow the destroyer [to strike]”; then the mezuzah which is a greater mitzvah—since it has the name of Hashem written ten times inside of it, and it is observed by day and by night, as well as throughout the generations—how much more so [we are guaranteed] that it will prevent the destroyer!

Protective Inscriptions Inside the Mezuzah

In medieval times, it was common for mezuzot to contain protective inscriptions such as various names of Hashem, names of angels, hexagrams, and letters from the ancient

יה	שמע ישראל יהוד אלדינו יהוד אחד: ואהבת את	1.
יה	יהוד אלדיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך והיו	2.
מיכאל	הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך: ושננתם	3.
יהוה	לבניך ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך	4.
גבריאל	ובשכבך ובקומך וקשרתם לאות על ירך והיו לטמטפת	5.
שמרך	בין עיניך וכתבתם על מזוזת ביתך ובשעריך: •	6.
עזריאל	והיה אם שמע תשמעו אל מצותי אשר אנכי	7.
יהוה	מצוה אתכם היום לאהבה את יהוד אלדיכם ולעבדו	8.
צדקיא	בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם ונתתי מטר ארצכם בעתו	9.
צלך	יורה ומלקוש ואספת דגנך ותירשך ויצהרך ונתתי	10.
שרפיאל	עשב כשדך ^א לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת השכרו לכם	11.
על	פן יפתח לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים	12.
רפאל	והשתחיתם להם: והרה אף יהוה בכם ועצר את	13.
יד	השמים ולא יהיה מטר והאדמה לא תתן את יבולה	14.
ענאל	ואבדתם מהרה מעל הארץ הטובה אשר יהוד נתן לכם	15.
ימינך	ושמתם את דברי אלה על לבבכם ועל נפשכם וקשרתם	16.
	אתם לאות על ידכם והיו לטמטפת בין עיניכם: ולמדתם	17.
	אתם את בניכם לדבר בם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך	18.
	בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך: וכתבתם על מזוזות ביתך	19.
	ובשעריך: למען ירבו ימיכם וימי בניכם על האדמה	20.
	אשר נשבע יהוד לאבותיכם לתת להם כימי השמים: ••	21.
	על הארץ ••• אוריאל יופיאל חסדיאל	22.

Hebrew script that resemble the shape of the “sign” the Jews were told to affix to their doorposts.

The Raavya (Eliezer ben Yoel HaLevi of Bonn 1140–1225), a contemporary of the Baalei HaTosafos and the Rambam, writes of his time that it is a normative practice for inscriptions to be added to a mezuzah.

The Rambam takes issue with this practice (that was then a widespread custom) of adding inscriptions to the inside of the mezuzah. However, the Rambam takes no issue with inscribing Hashem’s name Shin-Daled-Yud and the word כויו

כוזו on the outside of the mezuzah for protection. (The name Shin-Daled-Yud is an acronym for “Shomer Dalsos Yisrael” “Protector of the doors of Yidden” and כוזו כוזו spells out “Hashem, Elokeinu, Hashem” using a code that replaces the first letter of the Alef Beis with the last and the second with the second last and so on).

Rambam, Laws of Tefilin, Mezuzah, and Sefer Torah 5:4

מנהג פשוט שכותבים על המזוזה מבחוץ כנגד הריוח שבין פרשה לפרשה שדי ואין בזה הפסד לפי שהוא מבחוץ, אבל אלו שכותבין מבפנים שמות המלאכים או שמות קדושים או פסוק או חותמות הרי הן בכלל מי שאין להם חלק לעולם הבא, שאלו הטפשים לא די להם שבטלו המצוה אלא שעשו מצוה גדולה שהיא יחוד השם של הקב"ה ואהבתו ועבודתו כאילו הוא קמיע של הניית עצמן כמו שעלה על לבם הסכל שזהו דבר המהנהג בהבלי העולם

It is a common custom to write [Hashem's name,] Sh-D-Y, on the outside of a mezuzah opposite the empty space left between the two passages. There is no difficulty in this, since [the addition is made] outside.

Those, however, who write the names of angels, other sacred names, verses, or forms, on the inside [of a mezuzah.] are among those who do not have a portion in the world to come. Not only do these fools nullify the mitzvah, but furthermore, they make from a great mitzvah [which reflects] the unity of the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, the love of Him, and the service of Him, a device for their

own benefit. They, in their foolish conception, think that this will help them regarding the vanities of the world.

While the Rambam takes issue with protective inscriptions inside the mezuzah, he agrees that the mezuzah is principally a protective device (we know this from the fact that he allows the letters Shin-Daled-Yud to be inscribed on the outside). However, he maintains that its protection is connected to the fact that it is a holy object used for a mitzvah. The protection is inherent to the mezuzah and you certainly will not get any additional protection by defacing the inside of the mezuzah with all sorts of protective inscriptions.

But how does the Mezuzah protect?

While the answer to this question largely remains a mystery, a deeper look into the question of evil in Hashem's world can offer up some clues:

The Problem of Evil

How is it possible for evil to exist in a world created and governed by an omniscient and omnipresent Hashem who is only good?

Philosophers and theologians have taken several different approaches to addressing this question. To name a few:

Evil is a subjective illusion, it does not actually exist

Evil is not an entity, it is the mere absence of good

Evil is the concealment of Elokus, so from Hashem's perspective it doesn't exist (and if we were able to adopt Hashem's perspective, it wouldn't exist for us either), but it

is not an illusion, just as the rest of our reality was created by a concealment of Hashem's presence and wouldn't exist if Elokus was again revealed.

Evil exists because human comprehension is too limited to appreciate the reason for the things we call evil. Whereas, if we had a larger capacity for understanding, we would be able to appreciate the Divine justice and would recognize that it is not really evil.

Creator of Evil

The Jewish approach certainly does not deny the existence of evil, as the Posuk clearly designates Hashem as the creator of evil, indicating that: 1) Evil exists and 2) It is created by Hashem:

Isaiah, 45:7

יִצְרֵר אֹרֶךְ וּבֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ, עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם וּבֹרֵא רָע; אֲנִי ה' עֹשֶׂה כָּל-אֵלֶּה.

Fashioner of light, creator of darkness, maker of peace and creator of evil—I am Hashem, who does all of these.

This seems to contradict a basic Jewish belief that “ein ra yored milemalah” meaning that “no evil comes from above,” since the verse clearly states that Hashem is the creator of evil. The following Maamar by the Rebbe Rashab articulates an answer to this question:

Sefer Hama'amarim 5672, p. 880

אין רע יורד מלמעלה זהו מלמעלה דוקא היינו מעל לרקייע ופרסא המבדלת דשם הכל טוב... אבל ממה שנבדל תחת הפרסא מזה מתהווה

“Evil does not descend from above,” refers to the heavens above, beyond the curtain that separates [between Hashem’s Infinite Light and the created worlds] for there everything is good... Whereas, the creation of evil is derived from that which is separated beneath the curtain.

Evil is an entity that exists only from our perspective of created beings living in a created world. From Hashem’s perspective, there can be no evil.

In kabbalistic sources, the point of division between Elokusvand the created world is signified by a curtain, because, like a curtain blocking out sunlight, creation takes place when the Divine light is blocked from entering into our reality.

As a result, we are unable to see the complete picture as it is from Hashem’s perspective. This partial picture creates an entity that we call evil. From our perspective, it is indeed evil, and it is real, but only from our perspective—this is because we are not given the insight to see and understand Hashem’s master plan.

A Tribesman in surgery

To provide an analogy:

Imagine a primitive African tribesman is shown into a modern operating theater where a top surgeon is performing a heart transplant. He sees a live person wheeled into the room, the surgeon takes a blade, cuts open the man’s chest, and removes his heart.

Because he has never heard of the concept of surgery before, from his limited perception, the surgeon has performed the epitome of evil—a brutal act of murder in the first degree.

Obviously we know this not to be true because we are familiar with surgeons and operating rooms and we have insight into what a heart transplant is.

The same applies to the question of evil.

Because of “the curtain,” Hashem’s motives are not revealed to us; we are not given the possibility to understand the Divine justice in everything that transpires. Thus, when something doesn’t make sense to us, it is evil. However, were we to understand what is really going on behind the scenes (from the perspective of Hashem’s ultimate plan), there wouldn’t be any evil at all, because “behind the curtain” there is no evil.

Parting the Curtain

Every mitzvah helps part the curtain and brings a little more of Hashem’s perspective into this world, as the Alter Rebbe explains:

Lekutei Torah, B’haaloscha, p. 30b

הגורם לשכר מצוה היא המצוה בעצמה שהתורה והמצות הן הם המשכת גילוי אלקותו ית’ למטה.

The reward for a mitzvah is the mitzvah itself. This is because Torah and mitzvot are a projection of His revealed Elokus below.

Every time we perform a mitzvah, we part the curtain to reveal additional Elokus in this world. And while most of

the time we may not be able to detect it, Hashem's revealed presence causes there to be less evil and harm.

This is how an ordinary mitzvah can bring protection. However, the mitzvah of mezuzah is different to all other mitzvos, as the Rebbe Rashab points out:

Sefer Hama'amarim 5679, p. 503

מזוזה...הוא ענין קבלת עול מלכות שמים...וזהו דהמזוזה היא שומר.

Mezuzah is the idea of subjecting oneself to the kingdom of Heaven...which is why the mezuzah protects.

In addition to it being a mitzvah—and all mitzvos are about acknowledging Hashem's presence—mezuzah in particular is unique in this regard, since the content and act of the mitzvah is to recognize and subject yourself to Hashem's presence when you enter and leave the home. For this reason, it brings more protection than other mitzvot.

While every mitzvah effectuates protection against harm, the mezuzah stands out in this area, because, not only does it reveal Elokus, it connects us with Hashem Himself, enabling us to transcend the root of evil.

A Specific Reminder

This insight—that the Mezuzah represents a Jew's essential connection to Hashem's Essence—will help us understand the biblical narrative of Korach who rebelled against Moshe Rabeinu's leadership. One of Korach's primary complaints concerned the mezuzah:

קפץ קרח ואמר למשה...בית מלא ספרים מהו שיהא פטור מן המזוזה
אמר לו חייב במזוזה א"ל כל התורה כולה רע"ה פרשיות אינה פוטרת
את הבית פרשה אחת שבמזוזה פוטרת את הבית

Korach sprung forward and said to Moshe... "Is a house filled with Torah scrolls exempt from having a mezuzah?"

[Moshe] replied: "It still requires a mezuzah."

[Korach] said to him: "The entire Torah, containing 275 Parshiyos does not exempt the house, but the one Parshah of it that is inscribed in the mezuzah does?!"

Korach's argument was that if you are well versed in all of Torah, why do you need a specific reminder about certain details?

The Rebbe interpreted this to mean that even someone who knows everything still needs individual reminders to pay attention to specific details.

For example, you can know that Hashem created the world, but it wouldn't affect your life unless you have a Shabbos to make you stop and think about it.

The mezuzah is a specific reminder of Hashem's unity that we encounter every time we enter and leave our home. Hashem's unity is something we already know to be true, but we may not get a chance to think about it all that often.

TAKE-AWAYS

- » The mezuzah serves three functions: 1. A declaration of our faith in Hashem. 2. A constant reminder of Hashem's presence. 3. It demarcates our home as a Mishkan for the Shechinah to dwell therein.
- » In addition to the reward of long life for performing any mitzvah, the mezuzah uniquely serves as a protective device.
- » The mezuzah can protect even when it is not affixed to a door (e.g. in a car, on a desk, or beside ones bed), although this is not the mitzvah.
- » Evil is a symptom of not experiencing the complete spectrum of Divine reality.
- » Mezuzah is different to other mitzvos in that it is a constant reminder of Hashem's presence whenever you enter and leave the home.