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Perennial Protection

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1.

THE MEZUZAH PROTECTS

Alongside the commandment of the mitzvah of mezuzah (in our *parshah*) — “inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates”¹ — the Torah (immediately afterwards) describes the **reward** for this mitzvah:² “So that your days will be lengthened and the days of your children....” This reward is then incorporated as a **halachic ruling** in *Shulchan Aruch*:³ “All who are careful about observing this precept — their days will be lengthened, and the days of their children....”⁴

The mitzvah of mezuzah is like several other mitzvos in that the Torah explicitly discloses the reward for the mitzvah (similar to the mitzvah honoring parents,⁵ and so forth).⁶ But unlike other mitzvos, we find an additional reward for the mitzvah of mezuzah.

Our Sages say⁷ — and *Tur*⁸ quotes this teaching — that if a person affixes a mezuzah on the doorpost of his house, Hashem will protect it. (“A king of flesh and blood sits inside his palace, and his servants stand guard, protecting him from the outside. But you sleep in your beds, and the Holy One guards over you from the outside.”)⁹

This protection, brought about through fulfilling the mitzvah of mezuzah, is not the **reward** for the mitzvah. But (as *Bach*¹⁰ explains), it is a “benefit and profit yielded from the **very** mitzvah itself... **in addition** to the reward.” On this basis, *Bach* explains the wording of *Tur*: The protection that the mezuzah offers

¹ *Devarim* 11:20.

² *Devarim* 11:21.

³ *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” ch. 285; the *Tur*, *ibid.*, adds that “the home is thereby protected”; the *Beis Yosef*, *ad loc.*, states (in his first interpretation) that “this is an open miracle.”

⁴ *Shabbos* 32b.

⁵ *Shemos* 20:12; *Devarim* 5:16.

⁶ E.g., the mitzvah of Torah study.

⁷ *Avodah Zarah* 11a; *Menachos* 33b.

⁸ *Yoreh Deah*, ch. 285.

⁹ *Tur*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” ch. 285.

¹⁰ Commenting on *Tur*, *loc. cit.*

is “greater than” the reward “that your days will be lengthened,” for this is a benefit obtained from the very mitzvah itself.

Furthermore, the protection afforded by a mezuzah is not a secondary “benefit or profit” derived from the mitzvah. Rather, it is a primary element of the mitzvah of mezuzah, as *Tosafos* says,¹¹ “**serves to protect.**”

2.

THE PROTECTION IS PART OF THE MITZVAH ITSELF

Due to this mezuzah’s unique characteristic — that the very mitzvah provides the protection — there is a difference between the way the mitzvah of mezuzah is performed and how other mitzvos are performed.

Generally, the Torah explicitly tells us of the **reward** of a particular mitzvah, not just to inform us of the reward, but — according to *pshat*¹² — to strengthen¹³ us to perform the mitzvah expeditiously. Our Sages say,¹⁴ “A person should **always** engage in Torah study and performance of mitzvos, even if he does so not for their own sake.” Rambam codifies this advice in *Hilchos Teshuvah*, and he explains that this is how a person **must** be trained to study Torah:¹⁵ “Therefore, when one teaches children..., one **should** teach them **only** ... in order to receive a reward. As their knowledge grows and their wisdom increases, this secret should be revealed to them slowly, bit by bit. They should become accustomed to this idea (of learning Torah for its own sake) gradually....” Rambam also elucidates this approach in his *Commentary on Mishnah*,¹⁶ where he says that people who do not yet “appreciate the truth as Avraham Avinu... **we encourage them and strengthen their resolve**” to perform mitzvos in order to receive reward.

¹¹ *Menachos* 44a, s.v., “*tallis*.”

¹² {The plain meaning of Scripture.}

¹³ See Rashi, beg. of *parshas Acharei*.

¹⁴ *Pesachim* 50b.

¹⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Teshuvah*,” ch. 10, par. 5.

¹⁶ *Sanhedrin*, beg. of ch. 10, s.v., “*vekas hachamishis*.”

But on the other hand, clearly, if a person performs a mitzvah only for the sake of reward, the ideal performance of the mitzvah is lacking, since he does so “not for its sake.” Furthermore, even when a person performs a mitzvah in order to fulfill “the commandment of his Creator,”¹⁷ but he “also intends to benefit himself” — he gives charity¹⁸ “so that my son will live, or “so that I will be one destined for the World to Come” — although he is considered a fully righteous person (“in this matter”),¹⁹ this, too, is not the ideal way of performing mitzvos.²⁰

The above caveat, however, does not apply to the protection offered by a mezuzah. Since the protection (is not the **reward** for the mitzvah, but) is a result of (and a part of) the mitzvah itself, a person lacks nothing in his consummate performance of the mitzvah if he does so for the sake of protection, since this is an element of the mitzvah itself. Furthermore, as mentioned above, *Tosafos* says that this is the purpose of the mitzvah: “**serves to protect.**”

Moreover, one of the reasons why a mezuzah is affixed “in the handbreadth next to the public domain... so that should mezuzah protect {the entire house}.”²¹ Meaning, the fact that the mezuzah serves to protect a house is not only something that a person may **ponder** while affixing the mezuzah; this is specifically how the mitzvah is to be performed, in **actual deed**, as *Tur* goes on to say in his remarks.²²

3.

WE ENCOURAGE THEM TO DO SO AND STRENGTHEN THEIR INTENTIONS

Ostensibly, we can ask the following question: *Tur* himself concludes (after he quotes the above *halachah*): “Nevertheless, a person who fulfills the mitzvah should intend only to fulfill the commandment of the Creator, who so commanded us.” Meaning, we should **not** fulfill the mitzvah with the goal of being protected.

¹⁷ *Rashi* in *Pesachim* 8b, s.v. “harei zeh.”

¹⁸ *Pesachim* 8a ff.

¹⁹ *Rashi* in *Pesachim*, end of 8a.

²⁰ See *Iyun Yaakov* on *Ein Yaakov*, *Pesachim* 8a.

²¹ *Menachos* 33b.

²² *Yoreh Deah*, loc cit.

However, *Tur* does not use phraseology that implies that such an intention is **prohibited**. Additionally, it does not make sense to suggest that *Tur* means to teach that a person should not think about its protective feature at all when fulfilling the mitzvah. This is because, if how we **actually** perform the mitzvah demonstrates that the purpose is protection, as mentioned, how much more so, an individual is allowed to **give thought** to this benefit while performing the mitzvah.

Rather, *Tur* is only forewarning a person from performing the mitzvah with the **intention** of doing so for the benefit of protection that the mitzvah brings. This is because a person should fulfill the mitzvah with the same level of desire and meticulousness as if the mitzvah provided no protection at all. Rather, a person's intention should be to fulfill the mitzvah of the Creator. But on the other hand, a person is allowed, while he performs this action, to have in mind that this **mitzvah** comprises Hashem's instruction to us to implement **protection** for our homes.

Even then, when he performs the mitzvah **only** for the benefit of protection, his fulfillment of the mitzvah is (adequate, albeit) not for its own sake. Even concerning such a person (i.e., even a person with his sort of mindset and intelligence, etc.) as mentioned above (in the words of Rambam), “**we encourage them** and strengthen their resolve.”

4.

AN AMULET FOR THEIR OWN BENEFIT

Ostensibly, we can ask the following question: Rambam²³ rules (and *Tur*²⁴ quotes):

Those, however, who write the names of angels inside a mezuzah... these individuals are among those who do not have a portion in the World to Come. Not only do these

²³ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Mezuzah*,” ch. 5, par. 4.

²⁴ *Yoreh Deah*, ch. 288.

fools nullify the mitzvah, but furthermore, out of a great mitzvah, they make... as if it were an amulet for their own benefit...

Meaning, a person who thinks that a mezuzah is “an amulet for their own benefit” (because of the protection it offers) not only performs the mitzvah not for its sake, but such a belief is foolishness. Moreover, “they are among those who do not have a portion in the World to Come”?

[Rambam also says, “these fools nullify the mitzvah,” i.e., they nullify the mitzvah of mezuzah (because it is invalid). But this warning does not apply in our case because the reason the mezuzah is invalid in Rambam’s case is (not because “out of a great mitzvah, they make... an amulet for their own benefit...,” but) because the person added words (names of angels, etc.) **inside** the mezuzah. And Rambam rules in the previous halachah: “If the scribe added even a single letter inside the mezuzah, it is invalidated.”

When Rambam then continues, “out of a great mitzvah, they make...,” (this is not a reason but an addendum) to the phrase, “{they} nullify the mitzvah,” explaining and giving a reason that “they are among those who do not have a portion in the World to Come.”]

5.

AN AMULET FOR PROTECTION?

In truth, however, we cannot construe this halachah in Rambam as meaning that the only “problem” with the person’s action is that he has wrong intentions (i.e., to use the mezuzah as a protective device, “for his own benefit”). Firstly, it would be a stretch to say that for this reason, the person is called a fool, for “this mitzvah is performed for protection” (as mentioned). Moreover, “they are among those who do not have a portion in the World to Come.” Rambam himself rules explicitly,²⁵ “It is, however, permitted for a healthy person to read verses... **so that** the merit of reading them will **protect** him....” Meaning, a

²⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 11, par. 12.

person may use words of Torah to protect himself; and in this context, we do not say that he has turned Torah into an amulet used for his benefit, etc.

But, in truth, Rambam explains this issue himself by adding (after the words, “**an amulet for their own benefit**”): “They, in their foolish conception, think that this will assist them regarding the **vanities** of the world.”

When a person inscribes angelic names inside a mezuzah (notwithstanding the mezuzah being a protective device), it shows that he sees the mezuzah as totally unrelated to a mitzvah. (For it does not make sense to add to [the mitzvah and to] Hashem’s protection.) Instead, they see the mezuzah as “**an amulet for their own benefit...**” i.e., it is for **their** benefit, which is “the **vanities** of the world.”

Therefore, it is foolishness because a mezuzah protects only because it is a mitzvah, and **it** {the mitzvah} protects. They delude themselves (by adding to the mezuzah) and imagining that the protection does not come from the **mitzvah**, but from “an amulet for their own benefit...” For this reason, they believe that a mezuzah is something “that will assist them regarding the **vanities** of the world.” Therefore, “they are among those who do not have a portion in the World to Come.” This is like the law²⁶ regarding people who “relate to the words of Torah as if they were a **cure for the body**” — they are “included among those who deny the Torah,” for Torah is only “a cure for souls.”

In contrast, when a person affixes a halachically valid mezuzah, with nothing {no angelic names} added, thinking, while he fulfills the mitzvah, that he wants the **protection** the mitzvah offers, at worst, he fits into the category of someone who does a mitzvah not for its own sake.

In particular, when he does it not **only** for the sake of protection, but with the intent of fulfilling Hashem’s mitzvah — since Hashem instructed us to place a protective device on the entrance of our house — he then fulfills the mitzvah in the ideal way.

²⁶ *Mishneh Torah*, *ibid.*

6.

JUST FOR PROTECTION

On this basis — that the protection the mezuzah offers is not an additional “reward” or a “amulet”²⁷ aside from the mitzvah but is part of the substance of the mitzvah — we can explain something surprising that we find regarding the mitzvah of mezuzah:

The mishnah (in tractate *Keilim*)²⁸ lists utensils that contain a receptacle (for which reason “they are susceptible to impurity”). One utensil is “a stick that has a receptacle for a mezuzah.” *Tosfos Yom Tov* comments on this mishnah: “Perhaps, there were people in the times of the mishnah who carried a mezuzah with them. They thought it was a mitzvah, and they thought it would protect them.”

The mishnah mentions the possibility of “a stick that has a receptacle for a mezuzah” that a person uses for protection, and the mishnah does not negate this practice. This implies that this practice has some validity.

In truth, the Jerusalem Talmud implies (and moreover, proves) that a mezuzah itself has a protective property,²⁹ even in a scenario where there is **no** mitzvah fulfillment: The *Yerushalmi*³⁰ recounts that Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi sent a mezuzah to Artaban³¹ — a gentile — and said to him, “I sent you something that, while you sleep, **watches over you.**” That is, although a gentile cannot possibly fulfill the **mitzvah** of mezuzah, the mezuzah still affords him protection.

[This idea is demonstrated even more clearly in the continuation and conclusion of the story, as taught by the *She’iltos*:³² Artaban took the mezuzah... the mezuzah immediately offered him protection and the demon fled.]

²⁷ {In the original, “*segulah.*”}

²⁸ *Keilim* 17:16.

²⁹ {in the original, “סגולת השמירה.”}

³⁰ *Peah* 1:1, quoted in *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 35.

³¹ {Artaban IV, the last ruler of the Parthian empire.}

³² *She’iltos DeRav Achai Gaon*, ch. 145.

Ostensibly, this is odd: The custom in the times of the mishnah involved placing specifically a mezuzah in a stick. This proves that they chose the mezuzah not just because it was any section of Torah (which — in general — affords protection),³³ but because it was a **mezuzah** (and therefore, offered the protection of one). How, then, could this mezuzah have any protective properties? The law is that “if one hangs a mezuzah on a stick, it is invalid.”³⁴ As the Gemara goes on to emphasize: “He exposes himself to danger and does not fulfill the mitzvah.” As Rashi explains: “The house is not protected from dangers until he affixes the mezuzah on the doorpost properly.”

[The above Gemara recounts that “the members of the household of King Munbaz would hang mezuzahs on sticks, in their inns, in **remembrance** of the mezuzah.” And we find this regarding many mitzvos — we perform some remembrance of the mitzvah (when we cannot fulfill the mitzvah). For example, we use a shank bone {at the *seder*} on the night of Pesach as a remembrance of the paschal sacrifice. However, we do not find that by **remembering** a mitzvah, a person receives the reward of {doing} the mitzvah. The rationale behind this is obvious: Although a person does indeed make a semblance and remembrance of the mitzvah (which the Torah requires), reward is contingent on **fulfilling** the actual mitzvah.]

However, based on the above we can clarify this matter: Since the protection the mezuzah affords is associated with the actual mezuzah, consequently, some semblance of protection may also be afforded from the mezuzah itself even before a person **fulfills the mitzvah** of mezuzah. This is because the mezuzah was written for the sake of being a mezuzah, etc., or even {in the case of a gentile} like the story of Artaban.

³³ See *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Avodah Zarah*,” ch. 11, par. 12.

³⁴ *Menachos* 32b.

7.

NO MEZUZAH IN JAIL

Based on all the above, we can also explain a wondrous story told by the Previous Rebbe:³⁵ When the Previous Rebbe was in jail, during his first interrogation, he was asked, “Do you know where you are?” He responded, “Of course, I know where I am. I am in a place that is exempt from the obligation of mezuzah. There are places that are exempt from the obligation of mezuzah, for example: stables,³⁶ restrooms, etc.”

Seemingly, this is difficult to understand:

Why did the Previous Rebbe choose to respond **negatively** — “This place is **exempt** from the obligation of mezuzah”? Seemingly, it would have been more appropriate to respond positively, and say that he finds himself in a place where (even there), Hashem’s providence controls events because “His glory fills the entire world,” or something to that effect. Moreover, he **emphasizes** this point in recounting the story of his incarceration before and after the interrogation.

To bolster the question: (The Previous Rebbe recounted many times³⁷ how) he wanted to show his “captors” strong conviction and that he did not take them into account at all, to the extent that he viewed them as if they weren’t there, virtual nothingness and non-existence.³⁸ Thus, it would have been appropriate for him to say something along those lines.

The explanation: Even there, in jail, the Previous Rebbe wanted the protection of mezuzah. Since the actual fulfillment of the mitzvah was not possible, he did whatever he could to create some sort of remembrance of the

³⁵ *Sefer HaSichos* 5702, p. 82.

³⁶ See *Pischei Teshuvah* on *Yoreh Deah*, ch. 286, sub-par. 2, where he says that nowadays a cowshed is exempt from the obligation of mezuzah, “as we see clearly, it is extremely filthy.”

³⁷ *Sefer HaSichos* 5702, p. 82; *Likkutei Dibburim*, vol. 4, 626a, 639b; *Sefer HaSichos* 5701, p. 138.

³⁸ {In the original, “כאילו אינם וכאין ואפס ממש.”}

mezuzah. Furthermore, he spoke words of Torah about mezuzah (which elicits Divine protection similar to the mezuzah itself).

Therefore, the Previous Rebbe spoke about and clarified the *halachah* that the place where he found himself was exempt³⁹ from having a mezuzah. By doing so, he created a connection with mezuzah in two ways:

(a) By learning *halachos* of mezuzah, we apply the ruling of our Sages that “anyone who engages in learning the Torah {passages pertaining to the offering} of... is deemed as though he {actually} sacrificed...”⁴⁰ — it was as if he had fulfilled the mitzvah of mezuzah.

(b) By clarifying that halachically, **the house** {that he was in} (which **qualified** {physically} as a house, as described in the verse, “inscribe them on the doorposts of your **house**,”⁴¹ but in that case) was exempt from having a mezuzah, he also forged a connection (not only with the “**Torah**” dimension of mezuzah but also) with the **mitzvah dimension** of mezuzah, a negative connection — **that** house was exempt from having a mezuzah.

In slightly different words:

The **relationship** between a house and mezuzah can exist in one of two ways: (a) A house that needs a mezuzah is connected **positively** to the mitzvah of mezuzah — by affixing a mezuzah on the doorpost of the house. (b) A house that does not need a mezuzah is connected **negatively** to the mitzvah of mezuzah: We carry out Torah’s commandments and we do **not** affix a mezuzah there.

Perhaps this explains why the Previous Rebbe chose to say that he found himself in a **house** that is not obligated in **mezuzah**, for in this way he brought the protection of mezuzah upon himself.

³⁹ See *Iggeres Hakodesh*, end of ch. 26 (144b).

⁴⁰ *Menachos* 110a, quoted as a **halachic ruling** in Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec.1, par. 9.

⁴¹ In contrast to a room that doesn’t measure four cubits by four cubits, or the like, which isn’t included in this category at all (*Shulchan Aruch*, “*Yorah Deah*,” sec. 286, par. 13).

8.

THE MEZUZAH CAMPAIGN

Based on all the above, we can appreciate the great merit a person attains by exerting effort in the mezuzah campaign,⁴² especially in our times.

The Jewish nation exists as one lamb among seventy wolves who are saved by “the shepherd who saves and protects it...”⁴³ Especially true in light of the recent events where everyone saw **clearly** that the **victims’** houses did not fulfill the mitzvah of mezuzah properly.⁴⁴ The name of Hashem, written on the mezuzah such that it can be seen even when the mezuzah is rolled up, is ***shin-dalet-yud***. This is an acronym for the words *Shomer dalsos Yisrael* {He protects the doors of the Jewish people}. These victims did not have the name (and its protection).

Therefore, we need to undertake **every** effort to ensure that **every** Jewish home has a mezuzah on **all doors** that are required to have one, and that they should be affixed in a halachically prescribed manner.

Effort should be made to influence men and also women — who are obligated in the mitzvah of mezuzah equally as men.⁴⁵ This is especially poignant in light of the Gemara’s explanation:⁴⁶ “Do men require long life, and women not require long life?” [Moreover, a woman is the “mainstay of the **home**.” Thus, she has a special duty to care for the matters of the home — and by extension, for the home’s protection by fulfilling the directive in the verse,⁴⁷ “...upon the doorposts of your house.”]

⁴² {The Rebbe established ten mitzvah campaigns, by which Jews should encourage other Jews to fulfill ten specific mitzvos.}

⁴³ *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*Toldos*,” sec. 5.

⁴⁴ See the farbrengen of Shabbos *parshas Matos-Masei* 5736; et al.

⁴⁵ *Berachos* 20b, *mishnah*.

⁴⁶ *Kiddushin* 34a; *Yoma* 11b.

⁴⁷ *Devarim* 6:9.

By affixing mezuzahs, the house, and everything in it, is protected. Moreover, (as *Zohar* says)⁴⁸ the protection extends in a manner by which “Hashem will guard your **going** and coming now and forever”⁴⁹ — even when you leave the house.

Since the Jewish people are all responsible for one another,⁵⁰ and all the Jewish people are inherently one body,⁵¹ clearly, by enhancing the fulfillment of the mitzvah of mezuzah for **each** room requiring one, protection of the entire body — the entire Jewish nation, and **each individual** Jew, men, women, and children, wherever they are — will be enhanced.

In the words of the verse,⁵² “Hashem will guard your **going** and coming now and forever.”

— From talks delivered on *Shavuos* 5727 (1967), *Shabbos parshas Behaaloscha* 5727 (1967), and *Yud Beis Tammuz* 5734 (1974)

⁴⁸ *Zohar*, vol. 3, 263b.

⁴⁹ {*Tehillim* 121:8.}

⁵⁰ *Shavuos* 39a.

⁵¹ *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of “*Nitzavim*”; et al.

⁵² {*Tehillim* 121:8.}