

## Mezuzah

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A *mezuzah* (Hebrew: מזוזה "doorpost") (plural: *mezuzot* (תזוזות)) is a piece of parchment (usually contained in a decorative case) inscribed with specified Hebrew verses from the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21). These verses comprise the Jewish prayer "Shema Yisrael," and begin with the phrase "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One."

A mezuzah is affixed to the doorpost of Jewish homes to fulfill the mitzvah (Biblical commandment) to inscribe the words of the Shema "on the doorposts of your house." (Deuteronomy 6:9) Many families place a mezuzah on the front door only, but observant Jews fix one on every doorway in the home apart from bathrooms, and closets too small to qualify as rooms. The parchment is prepared by a qualified scribe (a "*sofer stam*") who has undergone many years of meticulous training, and the verses are written in indelible black ink with a special quill pen. The parchment is then rolled up and placed inside the case.

According to *halakha*, the *mezuzah* should be placed on the right side of the door (from the point of view of the person entering the room), in the upper third of the doorpost (i.e., approximately shoulder height), within approximately 3 inches of the doorway opening. A minority opinion is that the mezuzah should be affixed on the side opposite the hinge. In either case, *halakha* requires that *mezuzot* be affixed within 30 days of moving into a rented house or apartment. This applies to Jews living in the Diaspora (i.e. outside the Land of Israel). For a purchased home or apartment in the Diaspora, or a residence in Israel (owned or rented), the mezuzah is affixed immediately upon moving in. The case can be affixed to the doorpost with nails, screws, glue, or double-sided tape. Wrapping the scroll in plastic wrap before placing it in the case will protect it from the elements. Care should be taken to not tear or damage the parchment or the wording on it, as this will invalidate the *mezuzah*.

Where the doorway is wide enough, Ashkenazi Jews and Spanish and Portuguese Jews tilt the mezuzah so that the top slants toward the room into which the door opens. This is done to accommodate the variant opinions of the medieval Rabbis Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam as to whether it should be placed horizontally or vertically, and also to imply that God and the Torah (which the mezuzah symbolizes) are entering the room. Most Sephardim and other non-Ashkenazi Jews affix the mezuzah vertically.<sup>[3]</sup>

The procedure is to hold the *mezuzah* against the spot upon which it will be affixed, then recite a blessing:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His *mitzvot*, and commanded us to affix a *mezuzah*.

Any Jew can recite the blessing provided he or she is old enough to understand the significance of the *mitzvah*. After the blessing, the *mezuzah* is attached.

When affixing several *mezuzot*, it is sufficient to recite the blessing once, before affixing the first one. Orthodox Jews have a qualified scribe check the mezuzot parchments for defects (such as small tears or faded lettering) at least twice every seven years.

The commandment to affix a mezuzah is one that is widely practiced in the Jewish world, even by Jews who are not religiously observant. While the important part of the mezuzah is the "klaf," or parchment, and not the case itself, designing and producing mezuzah cases has been elevated to an art form over the ages. Mezuzahs are produced from an endless variety of materials, from silver and precious metals, to wood, stone, ceramics and pewter.

**Deut 6:4-9**

*4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (from New International Version)*

**Deut 11:13-21**

*13 So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today-- to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul-- 14 then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. 15 I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. 16 Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. 17 Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you. 18 Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 20 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. (from New International Version)*

