

“כתבתם על מזוזות ביתך ובשעריך”

In the Merit of the Mezuzah the Shechinah Dwells at the Doorway of the House in the Merit of a Deserving Husband and Wife the Shechinah Dwells inside the House

In this week’s parsha, parshas Vaeschanan, we find the first passage of Krias Shema. At the conclusion of this passage, one of the most important of the “taryag mitzvos” given to us by HKB”H appears—the mitzvah of writing a mezuzah and affixing it to the doorposts of our homes. Besides exploring the mitzvah of mezuzah, we will also examine HKB”H’s rationale for juxtaposing the mitzvah of mezuzah with the mitzvah of tefillin. For it is written (Devarim 6, 8): “וקשרתם לאות על ירך והיו: **“bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be “totafot” between your eyes; and write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.**

It is apparent that these two mitzvos differ greatly from one another. Clearly, tefillin are worn on a man’s body—on his arm and on his head; whereas, the mezuzah is affixed to the doorpost of a man’s house. Furthermore, HKB”H commanded that both the tefillin “shel yad” and “shel rosh” house four passages: “קדש לי כל בכור”, “והיה כי יביאך”, “שמע ישראל”, “והיה אם שמוע”. For, the mitzvah of tefillin is mentioned in each of these four passages. On the other hand, HKB”H commanded that only two passages be housed in the mezuzah: “שמע ישראל”, “והיה אם שמוע”. For, the mitzvah of mezuzah is mentioned in each of these passages.

We learn this fact from the following Mishnah (Menachos 28a): “**the two passages in the mezuzah are essential to one another.** Rashi comments: **The two passages in the mezuzah are “שמע” and “והיה אם שמוע”.** The Beis Yosef writes (Y.D. 285): **This is an obvious fact; for, it states in each of them: “And you should write**

them on the doorposts of your house . . .” In other words, because both of these passages mention the mitzvah of mezuzah, it indicates that these passages must be written on the doorpost. So, it behooves us to explain the juxtaposition of the mitzvah of mezuzah—which requires only two passages—with the mitzvah of tefillin—which requires four passages. Additionally, why, in fact, do we only inscribe two passages in the mezuzah versus four passages in the tefillin?

HKB”H Sits Outside and Guards His Servants Sitting Inside

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a passage in the Gemara depicting the exemplary practice of Rav Sheishes (Pesachim 68b): “**רב ששת כל תלתין יומין מהדר ליה תלמודיה, וקאי בעיברא דדשא ואמר, חדאי נפשאי חדאי נפשאי, לך Rav Sheishes routinely reviewed his studies every thirty days. Then he would lean on the door latch and declare: “Rejoice my soul, rejoice my soul; for you I’ve learned Torah, for you I’ve learned Mishnah.”**

Clearly, as one of the foremost scholars in the Talmud, Rav Sheishes, due to his immense kedushah, learned Torah l’shma—solely for the sake of Hashem. So, it is surprising that he would tell his soul that he was learning Torah for her sake. Additionally, let us endeavor to understand to some small degree the profound intent of Rav Sheishes’s practice. Why did he routinely review his Torah studies every thirty days, and then lean on the doorpost and always proclaim the same mantra: **“Rejoice my soul, rejoice my soul; for you I’ve learned Torah, for you I’ve learned Mishnah”?**

I was struck by a wonderful idea regarding the deeper significance of Rav Sheishes's practice. As we know, the mitzvah of mezuzah is a wonderful segulah for protecting the inhabitants of a house from all evil. For, we have learned in the Gemara (Menachos 33b):

”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 (תהלים קכא-ה) ה' שומרך ה' צלך על יד ימינך.”

Rabbi Chanina said: Come and see how the way of HKB”H differs from the way of human beings. With regards to human beings, the king sits inside and the people guard him from the outside. This is not the way of HKB”H; His servants sit inside, and He guards them from outside—as it says: “Hashem is your Guardian; Hashem is your protective shade at your right hand.”

Regarding this passage, we find a fascinating tale involving Onkelos, the convert, in the Gemara (A.Z. 11a). The Caesar was enraged by his conversion. This prompted him to send a Roman, military regiment to apprehend Onkelos and bring him to trial. When the first regiment arrived to apprehend Onkelos, he enticed them with divrei Torah and they all converted. The Caesar sent a second regiment, but warned them not to converse with Onkelos. When they met up with Onkelos, he skillfully engaged them in mundane conversation; they were captivated by his wisdom and they, too, converted. The Caesar sent a third regiment, and advised them not to speak with him at all.

They apprehended him and as they were exiting his house, he touched the mezuzah. The soldiers were curious and inquired about the mezuzah. Onkelos responded by quoting Rav Chanina's teaching (A.Z. 11a): **”מנהגו של עולם, מלך בשר ודם, יושב מבפנים ועבדיו משמרין אותו מבחוץ, ואילו הקב”ה עבדיו מבפנים והוא יושב מבפנים ועבדיו משמרין אותו מבחוץ, שנאמר ה' ישמר צאתך ובואך מעתה ועד עולם”** -- **“It is the way of the world that a human king sits indoors, while his servants stand guard outside; whereas with HKB”H, His servants sit inside, while He stands guard outside. .”** Immediately, they, too, all converted. After that, the Caesar did not bother to send any more regiments. Apropos this phenomenon, the Darkei Moshe (Y.D. 286, 4) writes in the name of the Shu”t of the Maharam of Rottenburg (108): **I am certain that any house that is equipped with a proper mezuzah, cannot be influenced by any harmful force.**

It Is Imperative that the Shechinah Dwell Both at the Doorway of a House and inside the House

Seemingly, we can raise a question regarding the statements of Rabbi Chanina and Onkelos, the convert, from the following Gemara (Sotah 17a): **”דריש רבי עקיבא, איש ואשה זכו שכינה ביניהן, -- לא זכו אש אוכלתן”** **Rabbi Akiva elucidates: If a husband and wife are deserving, the Shechinah dwells among them; if they are not deserving, they are consumed by fire.** Rashi explains that that the Hebrew word for man, איש, contains the letter “yud”; while the Hebrew word for woman, אשה, contains the letter “hei.” So, we see that Hashem divided up His name “י-ה” between a man and a woman. Consequently, if their marriage is successful, the Shechinah dwells among them. If, however, their marriage is unsuccessful, and the name “י-ה”, consisting of the letters “yud” and “hei,” is removed, what remains is אש and אש—two conflicting bodies of fire.

Now, according to Rabbi Akiva's elucidation, if a husband and wife are deserving, the Shechinah dwells within a house, as well. That being the case, how do Rabbi Chanina and Onkelos assert that the mezuzah indicates that HKB”H resembles a king sitting outside the house in contrast to a human king who sits within?

Let us demonstrate that both claims are correct and true. In reality, it is essential to perform two functions in order to successfully establish a proper Jewish home imbued with Torah and “yiras Shamayim.” Firstly, it is essential to fix a mezuzah at the entrance to the house, so that HKB”H will stand guard outside, preventing the yetzer hara and the forces of tumah from entering the house. Without this vital protection at the entrance to the house, the entire house will undoubtedly be corrupted—both materialistically and spiritually. In addition, it is essential to make every effort to sanctify the house with Torah-study and the performance of mitzvos.

Upon further consideration, it is evident that these two functions—aimed at ensuring the presence of the Shechinah both outside and inside the house—can be characterized as (Tehillim 34, 15): **”סור מרע ועשה טוב”**—**avoid evil and do good.** The protection afforded by the mezuzah at the entrance to the house constitutes an act of **”סור מרע”**—avoiding evil; it is a protective measure preventing any form of evil from entering the house and harming its inhabitants. On the other hand, drawing the Shechinah into the house to dwell among

a husband and wife constitutes an act of “ועשה טוב”—such as engaging in Torah-study and the performance of mitzvos so that the Shechinah will also come inside the house.

Uniting the Husband and Wife’s ה”י with the Mezuzah’s ה”ו

I would like to present upon the royal table a wonderful allusion explaining the fascinating connection between these two acts. Let us return to Rabbi Akiva’s elucidation, which has occupied many of the commentaries: “איש ואשה—**if a husband and wife are deserving, the Shechinah dwells among them.** As Rashi explained, HKB”H split his name ה”י between the man and the woman. This name, however, represents only half of the holy four-letter name Havaya. To complete the holy name, the letters ה”ו must be supplied. Many solutions and answers have already been provided to explain this phenomenon.

I would like to propose a novel approach to this matter based on the teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Mishpatim 119b) that the four passages housed in the tefillin correspond to the four letters of the ineffable name. The passage “קדש לי” corresponds to the letter “yud”; the passage “והיה כי בכור” corresponds to the first “hei”; the passage “שמע ישראל” corresponds to the letter “vav”; and the passage “והיה אם שמוע” corresponds to the last “hei.” Accordingly, the Zohar hakadosh (Nasso 140a) applies this notion to the passuk (Devarim 28, 10): “וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך”—**then all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will fear you.** This passuk alludes to the mitzvah of tefillin; they house four passages corresponding to the four letters of the holy name; therefore, donning them instills fear and reverence in the hearts of the other nations.

Thus, when we inscribe the two passages of: “שמע ישראל” and “והיה אם שמוע” in the mezuzah, we are supplying the two missing letters ה”ו. Based on our current discussion, this is marvelous. As we have learned, HKB”H placed His name ה”י with the deserving couple inside the house, leaving the two letters ה”ו absent. Therefore, HKB”H gave us the mitzvah of mezuzah at the entrance to the house, providing the husband and wife living there the opportunity to unite and complete the name Havaya with all four of its letters.

This explains very nicely the juxtaposition of the pesukim describing the mitzvah of tefillin and the mitzvah of mezuzah. For, we have learned in the Gemara (Shabbas 118b): “אמר רבי—**Rabbi Yossi—יוסי, מימי לא קריתי לאשתי אשתי... אלא לאשתי ביתי**.” **In all my days, I have never called my wife “my wife” . . . rather, I call her “my house.”** Rashi explains: **Because she is the essential component of the house.** In this manner, we can interpret the juxtaposition of the pesukim: “וקשרתם” — **לאות על ירך והיו לטוטפות בין עיניך**—“On the one hand, you should inscribe in the tefillin four passages corresponding to the four letters of the ineffable name; on the other hand: **על וכתבתם**—**you should only inscribe two passages in the mezuzah, corresponding to the letters ה”ו.**

As to why HKB”H only commanded us to write half of His name in the mezuzah, we find an allusion in the passuk itself: “**וכתבתם על מזוזות ביתך**”—because you reside there in the house with your wife, who is called “ביתך”. Hence, the name ה”י already dwells there with the two of you; now, by writing a mezuzah, containing the two passages corresponding to the letters ה”ו, you will be able to unify the name completely—uniting the ה”י with the ה”ו.

The Chasam Sofer’s Chiddush

Following this line of reasoning, let us elaborate further on this incredible concept—the ability to draw the Shechinah inside the house, not just to the doorway of the house. Regarding this concept, we find a tremendous chiddush in the Derashos Chasam Sofer (Chanukah). He explains that this notion regarding the mitzvah of mezuzah touted by Rabbi Chanina and Onkelos only held true after the churban of the Beis HaMikdash. During the times of the Beis HaMikdash, HKB”H sat, so to speak, inside the house, in the Kodosh HaKodashim. His servants, the kohanim and leviim, stood guard over Him outside. After the churban, however, HKB”H stood guard like a king outside the house, watching over His servants sitting inside. Here are his sacred words:

“הנה ענין מזוזת עבדיו יושבים בפנים והוא משמרם מבחוץ, הענין בזה, כשעושים רצונו הרי הקב”ה בחינת מלך יושב בפנים בדביר קדשו הארון והלוחות וכו’, ומשרתיו סובבים מבחוץ, (מדות פרק א משנה א) ככ”ד מקומות הכהנים והלויים שומרים בבית המקדש. אמנם כשאינם עושים רצונו ח”ו ורק נשארה האמונה, וחס ושלום הקב”ה מבחוץ (ישעיה גז-ח) ואחר הדלת והמזוזת שמת זכרונו, זה רמז ב' פרשיות אמונה שבמזוזת שקובעים בחוץ על הדלת, מכל מקום הוא יתברך שמו שומר אותם, (ויקרא כו-מד) ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ אויביהם וגו' אני ה' אלקיהם.”

Now, while it is true that in times of galus, HKB”H stands outside, so to speak, next to the mezuzah, watching over us. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon us to bring Him into the house. We are all familiar with the holy Alshich’s commentary on the passuk in parshas Terumah (Shemos 25, 8): “ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם” -- **and they shall make Me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them.** He points out that the passuk employs the term “מקדש”—sanctuary—in the singular; hence, the passuk should have concluded with the term “בתוכו” also in the singular. So, why does the passuk employ the plural term “בתוכם”?

He answers that HKB”H intended to teach us a vital lesson regarding the Beis HaMikdash. The ultimate goal is for HKB”H to rest His Shechinah within each and every Jew. Afterwards, the presence of the Shechinah extends from each individual Jew to the Beis HaMikdash. Once the presence of the Shechinah from every individual Jew is gathered together in the Beis HaMikdash, there is an immense concentration of kedushah. This then is the message of the passuk: “ועשו לי מקדש”—**make Me a Mikdash**, but My ultimate goal and desire is: “ושכנתי בתוכם”—to dwell within each and every Jew.

So, it is true that in the aftermath of the churban, we suffer a tremendous loss; HKB”H no longer rests His Shechinah in the Kodosh HaKodashim with the loyal kohanim and leviim watching guard outside. Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of the Beis HaMikdash is: “ושכנתי בתוכם”—to dwell within each and every Jew. Therefore, even in the aftermath of the churban, every Jew has a sacred obligation to bring the Shechinah into his house to dwell between the husband and wife. Thus, the Jewish home will represent a “miniature sanctuary”—a “Mikdash m’at”—in which HKB”H rests His Shechinah.

From the Inception of the World HKB”H Desired a Dwelling Below

To fully comprehend the extent of this matter, let us introduce a statement from our blessed sages in the Midrash Tanchuma (Nasso 16):

“בשעה שברא הקב”ה את העולם, נתאווה שיהא לו דירה בתחתונים כמו שיש בעליונים, ברא את האדם וצוה אותו ואמר לו (בראשית ב-יז), מכל עץ הגן אכול תאכל ומועץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו, ועבר על צויו, אמר ליה הקב”ה, כך הייתי מתאווה שיהא לי דירה בתחתונים כמו שיש לי בעליונים, ודבר אחד צויתי אותך ולא שמרת אותו, מיד סילק הקב”ה שכניתי לרקיע הראשון.”

From the moment of creation, HKB”H desired to have a dwelling below among us—just as He has in the heavenly realm. Nevertheless, due to the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as,” He removed His Shechinah from this world. As the Midrash (ibid.) explains, the situation was rectified when the Mishkan was erected, and HKB”H rested His Shechinah in it, as it is written: “ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם”. Unfortunately, it was only temporary. Ever since the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, as a result of our numerous transgressions, the Shechinah has been exiled from place to place without a place to rest, as we learn in the Gemara (Megillah 29a): “תניא רבי שמעון בן יוחי אומר, בוא וראה כמה חביבין ישראל לפני הקב”ה, שבכל מקום שגלו שכינה עמהן, גלו למצרים שכינה עמהן... גלו לבבל שכינה עמהן... ואף כשהן עתידין ליגאל שכינה עמהן.” Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai states that it is a testament to how much HKB”H loves Yisrael; wherever they were exiled to, the Shechinah accompanied them. In similar fashion, when they will be redeemed in the future, the Shechinah will be with them.

Elsewhere, in the Tikunei Zohar (Introduction 1b), the divine Tanna Rashb”y teaches us that this in fact is the allusion in the passuk (Bereishis 8, 9): “ולא מצאה היונה מנוח לכף רגלה”—**but the dove could not find a resting place for the sole of her foot.** The dove alludes to the Shechinah that is unable to find a resting place while in exile. Hence, it is imperative that we find Her a resting place by engaging in Torah-study and performing mitzvos: “אין חסיד אלא המתחסד עם קונו דעביד ליה קן”—**the only true chassid is one who is benevolent toward his Maker, providing Him with a resting place.** Thus, it should be evident that even in galus, we are obligated to fulfill HKB”H’s original wish: “נתאווה שיהא לו דירה בתחתונים כמו שיש בעליונים”—to provide Him with an earthly abode comparable to His heavenly abode. We can accomplish this feat by drawing and welcoming the Shechinah into our homes: “איש ואשה זכו שכינה ביניהן”.

This is the implication of Shlomo HaMelech’s statement (Shir HaShirim 5, 2): “אני ישנה ולבי ער קול דודי דופק פתחי לי אחותי”—**I let my devotion slumber, but my heart was awake! A sound! My Beloved knocks! He said, “Open your heart to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My perfection.”** The Midrash Rabbah (ibid.) expounds this passuk as referring to the galus: “אני ישנה מבית המקדש ולבי ער”—my slumber and waning devotion refer to the Beis HaMikdash, while my alertness and state of wakening refer to Batei Kenesses and Batei Midrash. In

this vein, we can interpret the continuation of the passuk as follows: “קול דודי דופק פתחי לי” —HKB”H, Who stands outside, at the doorway to our house, next to the mezuzah, pleads with us not to leave Him standing outside at the doorway like a beggar or a poor person. Instead, let us open our doors, so that the Shechinah can dwell inside our homes, in keeping with the notion of: “איש ואשה זכו שכינה ביניהן”.

So, how than can we, lowly creatures of flesh and blood, who are here one day and gone the next, shamelessly turn a deaf ear to HKB”H’s knocking on our doors beseeching us: “פתחי לי אחותי” “רעיתי יונתי תמתי” And how do we then dare daven the words “שמע קולנו ה’ אלקינו חוס ורחם עלינו”, pleading with Hashem to heed our pleas when we don’t heed His? Who can be so ungrateful toward He Who has provided us with everything--leaving Him outside and not welcoming Him into our homes?! Let us welcome Him into our homes thereby fulfilling His simple, age-old request: “שיהא לו דירה בתחתונים כמו שיש בעליונים”.

Rav Sheishes Stood by the Mezuzah to Converse with HKB”H

Now, we can rejoice! For we can shed some light on Rav Sheishes’s exemplary behavior. As we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 8a): “מיום שחרב בית המקדש אין לו להקב”ה בעולמו: “מיום שחרב בית המקדש אין לו להקב”ה בעולמו של הלכה בלבד” —since the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, HKB”H has to be content with a mere “four cubits of halachah.” Prior to the churban, the dwelling place of the Shechinah was the Beis HaMikdash, as it is written: “יעשו לי” מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם”.

When the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the Shechinah vacated the premises. Yet, a person who studies Torah merits the presence of the Shechinah, as we learned above in the Mishnah (Avot 3, 6). This then is the message of the Gemara:

“מיום שחרב בית המקדש” —since the Shechinah left the Beis HaMikdash--“אין לו להקב”ה בעולמו אלא ד’ אמות של הלכה בלבד” —HKB”H rests His Shechinah upon those engaging in Torah-study. This is why Rav Sheishes studied Torah in his house; he was establishing “four cubits of halachah” in his home in order to provide the Shechinah with a resting place.

To explain his rationale for doing so every thirty days, let us introduce a halachic ruling pertaining to ordinary rental agreements. The term of a generic rental agreement is thirty days. The source for this ruling is the Gemara (B.M. 101b). As Rashi there explains: “דהשוכר סתם שלא פירש זמן הוי שכירות שלשים” —if it is not specified otherwise, a standard rental is for thirty days. Similarly, the Gemara teaches us elsewhere (R.H. 7b): “דלא טרח איניש למיגר ביתא לבציר מתלתין יומין” —**people do not bother to rent a house for less than thirty days.** This explains why Rav Sheishes would review his Torah studies every thirty days; he wished to renew his monthly lease with HKB”H, insuring that the Shechinah would remain inside his house in the merit of his Torah-study.

In this manner, we also explain very nicely why Rav Sheishes would lean on the doorpost, where the mezuzah was located, at the conclusion of each thirty-day period of learning. For, HKB”H stood there, outside the house, watching over those living inside the house. There he would exclaim to HKB”H: “חדאי נפשאי חדאי נפשאי”, “**my soul is gladdened, my soul is gladdened**”; and he would explain to HKB”H the reason for his joy: “לך קראי, לך תנאי” —**I learned Torah in your honor and I studied Mishnah in your honor**; in this merit, you no longer need to remain outside. Please rest Your Shechinah inside the house! This is why my soul is happy—because I have been privileged to fulfill HKB”H’s wish to have a dwelling down below among us.



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