

TOUCHING OUR HOME SECURITY SYSTEM

BY TAMAR ANSH



What is the first thing that greets you when you approach a Jewish home, the item that marks it as being a Jewish home? It's not the bikes strewn across the front yard, nor even the aroma of a freshly baked challah or potato kugel wafting through the windows.

Just look up as you walk through your own doorway — you'll automatically touch on the answer.

The Torah tells us in next week's parashah (*Devarim* 6:9) that in order to live in our homes, we must first put up kosher *mezuzos*. "You must affix *mezuzos* on your doorposts and your gates."

The commandment to put up *mezuzos* is something we recite every single day in our *tefillos*, and of which we are reminded every time we enter or leave our homes.

Yet caring properly for our *mezuzos* is also a *mitzvah*, and one that many people are not aware of. Yes, we all know that we need a *mezuzah* on every doorpost (remember the Uncle Moishy song about it? Just ask any child!). Then why is it that so many observant, G-d-fearing adults do not know more about *mezuzos*? Somehow, many of us overlook the laws of *safrus*, thinking that it's the *sofer's* job to know these laws and that he'll take care of it for us.

It is true that there are laws that most of us do not spend a whole lot of time on — *shechitah*, for example. It is customary to

rely on a trustworthy *shochet* to take care of *shechitah* for us. However, this is only because we are not all commanded to *shecht* our own meat. But every Jew lives in a home of some type, and we are commanded that, be it ever so humble, our home must have kosher *mezuzos* on its doorposts. This law is applicable to every one of us, not just the *sofer* or the butcher.

The *halachah* goes further. The *Gemara* (*Yoma* 11a; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Y.D.* 291:1) states that every Jew must check every one of his home's *mezuzos* twice every seven years. It's not enough to just put them up; we also have to make sure they remain valid. Why is it that so many people do not think about this constant *mitzvah* ... until something untoward happens to bring it to their attention?

Rachel T. began to work from home. In the absence of a spare bedroom, she decided that their "sealed room" (mandatory in newly built Israeli apartments) would double as her office. Rachel began working, and at first things went well. Until one day, her hand began to hurt so badly that she couldn't work. That's when it occurred to the T. family that perhaps they should check their *mezuzos*. The *sofer* discovered that the *mezuzah* on the doorpost

of that particular room had suffered water damage beyond repair.

Shimon R.'s family was living abroad at a while when they realized that some time had elapsed without checking the mezuzos of their Israeli apartment. In the course of the inspection, the sofer discovered a hole in one mezuzah, next to a letter. In shock, the sofer exclaimed, "See this tiny hole! But we can fix it!"

Shortly afterward, Shimon was seriously injured in a bus bombing in Israel. The surgeon took an X-ray of his esophagus and told his mother, "See this tiny hole! But we can fix it!" They were speechless. These were the exact words the sofer had used after checking their mezuzos just a few weeks earlier! Baruch Hashem, Shimon has since had a full recovery...

It is nothing new to hear amazing stories connected with invalid mezuzos and the yeshuos occurring after they were repaired. But how many of us remember to have them checked on time, or even realize what is involved in doing it properly? And if you don't know what to do, to whom should you turn?

Enter Reb Dovid Fridrich, certified *sofer Stam* who lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh and has been personally involved in checking mezuzos — on site — in private homes.

Mr. Fridrich, how did you become involved in the mitzvah of mezuzah?

I did not start out by focusing only on mezuzos. Shortly after I married, I needed to find a way to augment our income. The obvious choice was to do what came naturally to me — use my handyman skills to fix things. After doing this for some time, our *shadchan*, who found me my wonderful wife, suggested that I use my artistic talents to become a *sofer* instead of continuing to work as a handyman.

The idea appealed to me, so I took



Rabbi Dovid Fridrich labels the *mezuzos* as he takes them down and checks each one thoroughly.

an introductory course in *safrus*. After seeing that I had the necessary talent, I then enrolled in a full-year course with a *sofer mumcheh* [an expert] to hone my *safrus* skills. *Baruch Hashem*, since that time I have been *zocheh* to finish writing six *sifrei Torah*, many *megillos*, *tefillin* and of course, *mezuzos*.

As many *sofrim* will tell you, we are often asked to check *mezuzos*. The more I saw what was going on among just my own neighbors, friends and family, the more concerned I became. There are so many misunderstandings, even among otherwise very knowledgeable *frum* people, about what the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah* entails.

There have been times when I get to a home and discover that the *front door* does not have a *mezuzah*! How can it be that a *shomer Shabbos* family has a front door without a *mezuzah*!

Here's a typical scenario: An acquaintance of ours enclosed a porch near the front door, and built an outside private entrance. They hired a good company, drew up plans, ripped up floors, redid the whole thing — it's gorgeous. As they neared completion, they put up paintings, added fancy adornments and sighed with satisfaction at a job well done.

But even though they are religious Jews and keep all the *halachos*, they were not aware of the need to FIRST and foremost, put up a *mezuzah*.

This has to be the **first** thing; it comes before the paintings, the throw rugs and the renovated kitchen cabinets.

What inspired you to take action and start your mezuzah awareness project?

The more I saw the state of affairs in people's homes the more concerned I became, knowing that this most basic *mitzvah* was so neglected. Knowing that many otherwise well-educated Jews are overlooking something so critical made me decide that it simply was not enough to wait for people to come to the *sofrim* and have their *mezuzos* checked, because there are usually many other things that can render a *mezuzah* invalid besides the *klaf* itself!

For instance, after a person's *mezuzos* are checked and found valid, if it is on the incorrect side of the doorway, or put up improperly, there is no *kiyum hamitzvah*: it's as if there is no *mezuzah* there at all.

After seeing so many of these kinds of misunderstandings, I realized that people need help. So I decided to open my Mezuzah Mentch service and go out directly to help people instead of waiting for them to come to me.

Here's another example: Just last week I was called to a home. I took down all the *mezuzos*, checked that they were all *mehudar*, 100-percent okay ... except one. When I went to reaffix the laundry room *mezuzah* I realized that the client had overlooked that it was on the wrong side of the doorway. After taking a good look at his laundry room setup, here is what I surmised: the laundry room was originally a large porch. At some point, it was enclosed and windows and doors were put in, and was now more than two square meters (6 sq. ft.) in size.

Originally, they had affixed the *mezuzah* according to the Chazon Ish *shitah* — the opinion that a *mezuzah* should be affixed on the right side of the doorway coming *into* the home. Then only later on, when they made their porch an addition to the house — which now made it a real room that

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Rabbi Fridrich with a client putting a *mezuzah* back up on the doorpost.

according to the Torah required a *mezuzah* — it was never switched to the other side of the doorway.

Now, just think about this: how many times do the members of a typical Jewish family go in and out of the laundry area? Probably at least four times a day. And each time, this family was entering and leaving a room that did not have a *mezuzah* according to the basic *halachah*.

This is an obvious mistake, but it happens all the time. Had the client taken the *mezuzos* down himself and brought them to me, the *mezuzah* itself would have been kosher, but the *kiyum hamitzvah* could have been incorrect and the *mezuzah* placed on the wrong side of that room until the arrival of Moshiach, *bimheirah b'yameinu*!

I feel very strongly that raising awareness of all the aspects of the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah* is absolutely vital. Why wait until something tragic, scary or upsetting happens?

Why do you think people don't remember or schedule mezuzah checking on a regular basis?

Who remembers every three and half years to take care of things? Most people have difficulty even saying something like *Sefiras HaOmer* every day and have to consciously ask themselves, "What did I count yesterday?" Just yesterday! Others simply have difficulty physically taking care of it — it can be an overwhelming job: the hassle of taking *mezuzos* down without damaging the walls or even the *mezuzos* themselves, the details of labeling each *mezuzah* in order to return it to the same doorway from which it came, shuttling back and forth to the *sofer* and then to the *mezuzah gemach* for replacements. This could be an issue, especially when the occupants of the home are elderly or not so handy.

What do you do when you get to a home?

I begin by going through the house with the client and checking that every opening

that needs a *mezuzah* has one. I make sure that the cases properly protect the *mezuzos* and are attached firmly to the doorposts. I check the *mezuzah* parchments for accuracy, *kashrus* and quality. I make necessary corrections before reaffixing each *mezuzah*. If necessary, I lend *mezuzos* if the ones in place have more serious flaws and require a halachic ruling by a *posek sta"m*. For this reason and others, I opened a *gemach* of *mezuzos* and *tefillin* 14 years ago so that people can borrow what they need until theirs are fixed.

My aim is to have each home, school, office or business that I check in full compliance with the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah min haTorah*.

What are some other typical problems you have seen?

Mezuzos that were placed upside down, or parchments that were rolled the wrong way ... *mezuzos* that have fallen off altogether or are damaged from sun or water ... even doorways where *mezuzos* were missing ... improperly or poorly written *mezuzos* ... people think you can be *mekayem* the *mitzvah* for just a few dollars.



Rabbi Fridrich checking the klaf of one of the mezuzahs

If it's too cheap something is wrong.

So how is the average Jew supposed to know how to buy a good-quality, kosher mezuzah?

I feel that just as people will go to a Rav to show their *esrogim* or ask *she'eilos*, one should go to a knowledgeable Rav whom you trust, to ask his opinion about how and from whom to buy your *mezuzos*. Be aware that not all Rabbis are familiar with the field of STa"m, and this is a necessary factor when asking your questions.

What should we look for if we want to buy a good mezuzah?

Before buying them, have *mezuzos* checked. This can be done rather simply by just making a photocopy [of the parchment] and showing it to someone knowledgeable before you finish the deal. With *tefillin*, people will listen to this advice, probably because *tefillin* is such a large and usually one-time expense. But for *mezuzos* many don't think of this.

When a person's child is sick, *lo aleinu*, he will make sure to go to only the best specialist. Our *mezuzos* are the "security system" of our homes. The difference between a fully kosher *mezuzah* and a non-kosher *mezuzah* is that it either complies with the requirements of the *mitzvah* from the Torah ... or it doesn't!

I'd like to explain this concept further with what I call my "hiddur mitzvah" story:

A father who had triplet sons, Reuven, Shimon and Levi, wanted to teach the boys about the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av*. When the boys were 10 years old he asked each of them to bring him a cup of water in turn. Day one he asked Reuven, day two, Shimon, and on day three, Levi. On Shabbos he gave the boys a "day off." At varying times during the week, once a day, the father would request a cup of water from the designated child.

Reuven would go to the kitchen, find a used paper cup that was slightly chewed and still a little dirty, rinse it out, fill the cup with tap water, and bring it to his father. Shimon would go to the kitchen, take out a clean cup, fill it with cold water from the fridge, and bring it to his father. Levi, however, would go to the kitchen, take out a fancy glass, pour imported bottled water into it, add two cubes of ice, arrange it all on a tray with a napkin and a plate of fresh cookies, and then present it with a smile to his father.

Which son honored the father the most? They all brought him water as he requested.



Rabbi Fridrich at a *hachnasas sefer Torah* for one of the *sifrei Torah* he wrote.

What is the most powerful incident that ever happened to you?

I'm not fond of the term "most powerful" because for every person, what happened to him is what is important. And it's impossible to say that things that happen are "only" because of the *mezuzah*. The real truth is that we don't know *cheshbonos Shamayim*.

A fellow I know told me that his friend opened a business. It should have taken off but didn't. Then his car caught on fire. After seeing these problems, he checked his *mezuzos*. During the checking, it came out

that while a *mezuzah* should say "*asher nasan Hashem lachem*," there was a mistake in the writing: the original *sofer* forgot the *reish* and it said instead, "*eish*" (fire) *nasan Hashem lachem*.

Is it only because of the *mezuzah*? There is no way to know that. I'm not a prophet, but I do know that if Hashem tells us to keep His *mitzvos* you have to be really careful about the details of each of them.

The obligation of the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah* falls on the occupant of the home, male or female. Think how delighted Hashem is to know that you love Him and you want Him in your home.

Some advice:

- *Mezuzos* should be checked twice every seven years.
- If you have not had your *mezuzos* checked for three and a half years, don't procrastinate. It is not necessary to wait until next Elul to do this *mitzvah*.
- Outdoor *mezuzos* must have waterproof cases.
- Make sure that all *mezuzos* in your home are written according to your family's custom.
- Mark on a calendar when you last checked your *mezuzos* (and *tefillin*) and when you will need to do so again.
- If you are renting an apartment in *chutz laAretz* you are not obligated to affix a *mezuzah* for 30 days. However, if you rent in Eretz Yisrael, or you buy an apartment in *chutz laAretz* you are obligated to affix a *mezuzah* the day you move in. This mistake is very common when purchasing a summer home.
- A Jew's *mezuzos* are like radar in his home. It is up to us to make the required effort to make sure they are maintained properly. May Hashem bless all the homes of *Klal Yisrael* with His protection. ■