



Parashat Eikev
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Parashat Eikev includes the section of “*Ve-haya Im Shamo’a*,” the second paragraph of the daily *shema* recitation, toward the end of which the Torah presents the obligation of *mezuzah* (11:20). This *mitzva* requires affixing to one’s doorpost a parchment containing the two paragraphs of *shema*.

The Rambam describes the purpose of the *mezuzah* in his conclusion to the section of *Mishneh Torah* devoted to the specific laws relevant to this obligation:

A person must be meticulous with regard to *mezuzah*, because it is everyone’s constant obligation. And whenever one enters or leaves he encounters the oneness of *Hashem*, the Name of the Almighty, and will recall the love for Him and will awaken from his slumber and preoccupation with the vanities of the time. He will realize that there is nothing that remains forever and ever except the awareness of the “Rock of the world” [a poetic reference to God], and will then immediately return to his senses and follow the upright paths. The early sages said: “Whoever has *tefillin* on his head and arm, *tzitzit* on his garment and a *mezuzah* on his entrance is assured that he will not sin,” for he has many reminders. And these are the angels that save him from sinning, as it says, “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them” (Tehillim 34:8). (Hilkhos Mezuzah 6:13)

Maimonides ascribes to *mezuzah* the same general function served by the “garment-oriented” *mitzvot* of *tzitzit* and *tefillin*. These three *mitzvot* help draw a person’s attention to his responsibilities as a servant of God, thereby helping to ensure that he does not follow the natural course of becoming consumed by the “vanities of the time,” the physical and material delights of the world. By wearing *tefillin* and *tzitzit* and having a *mezuzah* resting upon his doorpost, a person designates several reminders that draw his attention away from the magnetic pull of vain pleasures.

Interestingly, Maimonides emphasizes in this context the specific notion of the eternity of religious observance. Upon seeing the *mezuzah*, Maimonides writes, one “will realize that there is nothing that remains forever and ever except the awareness of the ‘Rock of the world’.” The *mezuzah* puts into perspective the distinction between the “vanities of the time,” ephemeral earthly delights, and the eternity of *avodat Hashem* (serving God). Rather than speaking generally about the *mezuzah*’s function of reminding a person of his spiritual mission, Maimonides instead points to the particular message of distinguishing between the ephemeral and the everlasting.

Rabbi Yissachar Frand (<http://www.torah.org/learning/ravfrand/5764/eikev.html>) explained Maimonides’ comments to mean that the *mezuzah* serves as a “silent witness to the ebb and flow of history and human events.” The *mezuzah*’s quiet, uneventful, permanent

presence on the doorpost symbolizes the fact that people come and go, but the Torah endures forever. All types of people walk through the doorpost for any number of different reasons, and in any number of different circumstances, but the *mezuzah*, the Torah, stays the same. Symbolically, then, the *mezuzah* represents the eternal quality of *mitzva* observance, as opposed to the transient nature of everything else. Rabbi Frand commented:

Think about the *mezuzah* of an old shul or some other venerable edifice. It has been hanging there for decades if not centuries. It has seen infants brought into the shul to be circumcised, and it has seen these same people grown old brought into the shul to be eulogized and buried. It has seen generations come and go. It has seen empires rise and fall. It has seen the birth of ideologies and their demise.

The message of the *mezuzah* is thus conveyed through the contrast between the *mezuzah* itself and what transpires inside the building. Whereas everyone and everything inside the building constantly undergoes change, the *mezuzah* remains a constant, unchanging fixture. It thus reminds us of the contrast between the “vanities of the time,” the transience of the physical and material world, and the eternal quality of “the awareness of the ‘Rock of the world’,” the devoted service of God.