

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

שמע

At Home With Hashem

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

Teach them thoroughly to your children and speak of them ... Bind them as a sign on your arm ... And write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

ושנתם לבניך, ודברת
בם... וקשרתם לאות
על ירך... וכתבתם
על מזוזת ביתך,
ובשעריך.

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word

על מזוזת
ביתך

The word “mezuzah” literally means “doorpost.” It refers to a scroll of parchment containing the first two paragraphs of the “Shema” prayer, which is placed on the doorposts of one’s home. The Gemara (Menachos 33a) states that it is a mitzvah to put a *mezuzah* close to the outside so that it protects the entire house. The *Taz* (Yorah Deah 285) says that the *mezuzah* has the unique ability to protect us around the clock, even while we are asleep. The Hebrew letter “shin” is written on the case that holds the mezuzah. Although it refers to Hashem’s name *Sha-dai*, it also stands for “*Shomer Dalsos Yisroel*” - He [Hashem] protects the doors of the Jews.

The Gemara (Avodah Zara 11a) tells about a convert by the name of Onkelos the son of Kelonimus.

When the Roman emperor heard that Onkelos converted to Judaism, he sent soldiers to arrest him and reconvert him to his former religion. Every time, Onkelos managed to get the soldiers themselves to convert. Finally, the soldiers received orders not to say a word to Onkelos, so that they wouldn’t fall into his “trap” and convert to Judaism. As Onkelos was being led out of his house, he touched the mezuzah. The soldiers were overcome by curiosity and asked him why he did that. He answered, “When you Romans guard your emperor, you stay outside, and he’s safely inside. For us Jews, it’s different. G-d guards us, so he’s the one on the outside, protecting us safely on the inside.” The soldiers became so enthralled by this they decided to look into Judaism and eventually converted. Onkelos was saved by the mezuzah.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

A Protective Sign

A *mezuzah* on our home is a sign of Hashem’s protection and our belief that only Hashem can protect us.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Coming and Going

“*Mezuzah*” refers to a scroll that includes the first two paragraphs of the “*Shema*” prayer, declaring the oneness of G-d, and commanding us “to write [these words] on the doorpost of your house and on your gates” (Devarim 6:4-9). Every time one enters or leaves a Jewish home, he acknowledges the words of the *Shema* by placing his hand on the cover of the mezuzah (Rama, Yorah Deah, Siman 285, Se’if 2; Shach, Ibid, Se’if Katan 4). The *mezuzah* stands as a reminder to us whenever we enter or leave the room.

The Rambam (Mezuzah 6:12) teaches that every time a person walks in or out of a room with

the *mezuzah*, he should become aware of the existence of the One G-d and remember his love of G-d. This is meant to inspire the realization that nothing in this world is permanent other than *Hakadosh-Boruch-Hu*.

Imagine if every time we walked past the doorway we took a moment to ask ourselves where we are going and what we are hoping to accomplish? With such a perspective, our choices and our lives might be very different. Rather than only seeking out the elusive goal of happiness, we would, more importantly, direct our efforts toward the only eternal value there is – Hashem and His Torah.

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

High Tech Security

Every house in the exclusive Green Acres neighborhood was protected by a sophisticated alarm system. Only with these elaborate systems could the dwellers of these sprawling mini-mansions sleep soundly at night, without fear that an intruder could be breaking into one of the many windows



or doorways, tempted by the silver, jewels and cash each household possessed. To let any would-be thieves know that their schemes could not succeed, each house bore a sign on the lawn declaring that the house was protected by a certain alarm company.

The signs gave a sense of security to the residents, as well. But of course, they knew it was not the sign that made them safe, but rather, the large, sophisticated security company behind the sign.

Likewise, a *mezuzah* is a protection for our home. But it is not a magic amulet that casts an invisible shield around our dwelling. Rather, it is a reminder of Hashem, Who is the power behind the sign.

Try This!

Picture each mezuzah resting on the doorposts of your home, bringing Divine protection to you and your loved ones. Keep that image in mind when you say על מזוזת ביתך ובשעריך.

Did You Know

▶ **Letter by Letter**

When a person recites שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד he must draw out the letter א of the word אחד sufficiently to be able to meditate upon the fact that Hashem is a single entity in His universe. He must also draw out the second syllable with the letter ח, which has the numerical value of eight, bearing in mind that G-d is Master of the earth and the seven heavens. Finally, he must draw out the final consonant ד, which has the numerical value of four, to remind himself that G-d is Master over all four directions. However, one should not emphasize the ד too much, because then it would seem as if the ד has a vowel underneath it (e.g. “echade”) Rather, one should pronounce it carefully. (Orach Chaim 61:6, 7, Mishneh Berurah, ibid, 18, 21).