

TIMELESS∞TORAH

Summer Reflections

PARSHAT EIKEV - THE MEZUZAH: A SILENT WITNESS TO ETERNITY

The Mezuzah: A Silent Witness to Eternity

This week's parshah contains the mitzvah of mezuzah: 'And you shall write them on the doorposts of your homes and your gates'. (Devarim 11:20)

The mezuzah is always there. We pass it whenever we enter or leave a room. What are we meant to think of as we look at the mezuzah? The Rambam, at the end of the section of his famous work, Mishna Torah, dealing with Hilchot Mezuzah (6:13), tells us that the mezuzah inspires us to think about the eternal nature of the Almighty. This will in turn inspire us to realize that nothing in this world is permanent other than Hashem and His Torah. How does the mezuzah remind us of these incredibly lofty concepts?

Rabbi Yissacher Frand (USA, contemporary) offers an insightful perspective: Perhaps it is because the mezuzah is a silent witness to the ebb and flow of history and human events. 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.

In the last century alone, our hypothetical mezuzah would have seen humanism, capitalism, materialism, and existentialism, each embraced as life philosophies and then discredited. It would have seen the rise of the Soviet Union and Communism and their ignominious collapse.

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Rabbi Frand makes a powerful observation here. Amidst all the shifts and changes, the mezuzah remains unwavering. As humans we constantly chase after permanence, dreaming that a new invention, a brilliant idea, a magnificent building, or a profound book will grant us lasting renown. We tell ourselves, 'This will be timeless, this will make me immortal.' Yet, these efforts always fall short. Everything around us is in a state of flux; nothing truly endures. The only constants are the Almighty and His Torah. It is this profound truth that the mezuzah quietly attests to.

Embracing All: The Purpose of a Kehilla

They tell the story of a shul that was notorious for its exclusiveness. One day, a homeless Jewish man entered the shul, wanting to pray. He approached the rabbi and told him that he wished to join the shul. Not knowing what to say, the rabbi suggested that the homeless man take the night to reflect on which house of worship would truly suit him best.



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The following day, the homeless man returned to the exclusive synagogue. Frustrated, the rabbi asked the man if he had done any introspection as he had suggested.

“Yes,” replied the homeless man. “In fact, God came to me in a dream last night to discuss it with me.”

“I see,” said the rabbi. “And what did He tell you?”

“God asked me what shul I wanted to daven in, and I said yours. And He said, ‘Oh no, you won’t be able to get in there.’ And I said, ‘Why not?’ and He said, ‘Because I’ve been trying to get into that shul for years, but I can’t get in.’”

Ultimately, a Jewish community, a *kehilla*, exists to embrace all those who seek to discover our heritage and enable them to come together to perpetuate and celebrate our faith. Like the mezuzah standing guard - the shul has been there through it all, standing guard, watching, waiting, listening - and especially, embracing all who walk through its doorways. Even throughout the Covid lockdown, the shul was here. All it needs from us - like the mezuzah on our homes - is a response, a recognition that God is in control. A recognition that there is nothing more important in life than our faith and our commitment to it, and a belief that the very permanency of our Jewish identity will accompany us always.

Fear of Heaven: Our Enduring Responsibility

There is a striking verse in this week’s parashah: ‘Now, Israel, what does Hashem ask of you - except to fear Him, to walk in His ways, to love Him and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul’ (Devarim 10:12)

Commenting on this verse, Rashi tells us, ‘*Hakol bidei shamayim – chutz mi’yirat shamayim* - Everything is in the hands of Heaven – except for the fear of Heaven’.

So much in life remains out of our hands. Just one thing is - fear of Heaven, meaning the way we relate to our faith and our heritage. For Jewish life to flourish, it needs commitment, both personally and communally. These two go hand in hand. Yiddishkeit flourishes when people notice the mezuzah, when they hear the call of the eternal to them - both in their individual and their communal lives. It flourishes when people continue to observe our most vital and sacred traditions like Shabbat and Kashrut. And it flourishes when people are able to step out of their comfort zone and say, ‘*Hineini*. Here I am, let me be counted.’

It is our task to use the eternal inspiration of the mezuzah to find ways to connect with the timelessness of our heritage in every aspect of our lives.