

Affixing the Mezuzah *Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz*

- I. **How it should be attached.** The תורה tells us only that we must “place” מזוזות on our doorposts, but does not explicitly state any regulations as to how it should be placed by the doorpost. The פוסקים discuss various issues that pertain to placing a מזוזה on a doorpost.
- A. **Affixing a מזוזה.** When affixing a מזוזה we are faced with options ranging from attaching it with nails to taking a small piece of scotch tape. The רמב"ם (פרק ה' הלכה ו') writes that after rolling the מזוזה and placing it in the case, one should attach it to the doorpost with nails or dig a crevice into the doorpost where he can place the מזוזה. Although the implication seems to be that one must use nails to attach the מזוזה, the ערוך השולחן (רפ"ט:טו) writes that any sort of strong attachment (including strong tape) would suffice (see also מנחת יצחק חלק ז' סימן עב).
- B. **Hanging.** The גמרא (מנחות דף מב:) states that if a מזוזה is placed in a rod and then leaned or hung on the doorpost, it would be invalid. The גמרא explains that the מזוזה must be placed “in your gates” (בשעריך) which implies that it must be inserted into or attached to the actual doorpost, and not merely leaned on the doorpost from the outside. The רמב"ם (ה:ח) suggests that the מזוזה is פסול if affixed in this manner because it is not considered to be a permanent attachment. Since “hanging” a מזוזה (rather than affixing a מזוזה) is ineffective, the חיי אדם (כלל טו אות יט) writes that one must be careful to attach the מזוזה both on top and on bottom. Thus, a single nail attaching the top of the מזוזה to the doorpost does not suffice. This חידוש of the חיי אדם may not fit with the language employed by the רמב"ם in describing how to affix a מזוזה. The רמב"ם very clearly states that the מזוזה is to be attached with a “מסמר”, a single nail. He makes no mention of a requirement for a second nail. Perhaps the רמב"ם would assume that even a single nail is a more permanent form of attachment than hanging the מזוזה in a tube.

C. **Inside the wall.** The other option mentioned by the רמב"ם and שולחן ערוך is to place the מזוזה in a crevice dug into the doorpost. The פתחי תשובה (יורה דעה סימן רפט ס"ק ה') writes that considering the role that the מזוזה plays as a way to remind us of the presence of God, one must be careful that it be visible from the outside of the doorpost. If the מזוזה is dug too deeply into the doorpost to the point that it cannot be easily spotted, the מזוזה may be invalid. Even so, the ט"ז (סימן ט"ז רפו ס"ק ד') writes that when there is a concern that people will disrespect the מזוזה one may place it in such a way that it is not visible to the passersby from the outside. It is feasible to suggest that even the ט"ז only recommends placing it in a way that it is not visible "from the outside". Placing it in a way that it is not visible at all, however, may be completely invalid.

II. **The positioning of the מזוזה.** The גמרא (מנחות דף לג.) states somewhat cryptically that the מזוזה should not be hung "like a carpenter". The proper understand of this statement in the גמרא will impact how we hang a מזוזה on our doorpost.

A. **The מחלוקת ראשונים.**

1. (שם) רש"י explains that hanging a מזוזה like a carpenter means that it is placed in the doorpost horizontally, the way that carpenters would attach nails to a wall. Thus, in רש"י's view the מזוזה should be hung vertically on the doorpost, and is invalid if hung horizontally.
2. (שם) תוספות cites the opinion of the רבינו תם who maintains that "like a carpenter" means that it is hung vertically. Thus, in רבינו תם's view the מזוזה should be hung horizontally and is invalid if hung vertically.

B. **הלכה.** The שולחן ערוך (סימן רפט סעיף ו') rules in accordance with רש"י that the מזוזה should be upright in the doorpost. The רמ"א, however, cites the opinion of the רבינו תם and records the practice to fulfill both opinions by hanging it on an

angle. The later authorities discuss many issues relating to this suggestion of the רמ"א:

1. Many פוסקים were troubled by the suggested "compromise" of the רמ"א. After all, if רש"י insisted that the מזוזה stand straight and רבינו תם insisted that it lie flat, putting it on an angle seems to satisfy neither opinion, rather than achieving the goal of satisfying both opinions. Perhaps the explanation of the "compromise" lies in the formulation of the Talmudic statement upon which this הלכה is based. The גמרא never stated that the מזוזה must be positioned a certain way. It only insisted that it *not* be positioned "like carpenters". רש"י who understood the phrase "like carpenters" to mean a horizontal positioning would only disqualify positioning the מזוזה horizontally, but may not insist on a vertical positioning. רבינו תם who understood the phrase to mean vertical would only insist that the מזוזה not be placed vertically, but never insisted that the מזוזה specifically be positioned horizontally. Thus, hanging the מזוזה at an angle would not be problematic according to either view.
2. The רמ"א never clarified how much of an angle the מזוזה should be placed on. This ambiguity lead to a discussion of the issue amongst contemporary פוסקים:
 - a. The מקדש מעט (ס"ק ל') suggests that the angle should be very slight, just enough to recognize that the מזוזה is not standing upright. In fact, ספר יא reports that the חזון איש were practically upright, at only a slight angle.
 - b. שו"ת מנחת אלעזר חלק ב' סימן לו suggests that the מזוזה should be placed at a 45 degree angle. His

logic seems to be that in order to truly compromise between the opinions of the רבינו תם and רש"י, the מזוזה should be placed at the exact midpoint between the two extreme possibilities. Obviously, many doorways do not have enough space on the doorpost to place a מזוזה at a 45 degree angle, in which case even the מנחת אלעזר would endorse a more subtle angle.

3. **What if there is not sufficient space on the doorpost to angle the מזוזה?** The פתחי תשובה (ס"ק ט) cites the יד הקטנה that if the doorpost is too narrow to accommodate an angled מזוזה, the מזוזה should be placed upright. He explains that even the רמ"א who suggested the compromise would acknowledge that in reality the הלכה follows רש"י that the מזוזה should be upright. The suggested compromise only applies in a situation where it can easily be accommodated. In the very next paragraph, the פתחי תשובה cites the ספר חומות ירושלים who strongly implies that when there is no room to angle the מזוזה on the doorpost itself it should be placed just outside the doorpost. As a matter of practical הלכה, the opinion of the יד הקטנה seems to be more authoritative. To place the מזוזה outside of the doorpost seems to be a far greater halachic compromise than standing the מזוזה upright.