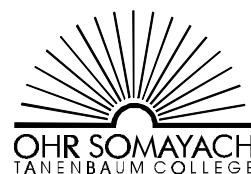




Ask The Rabbi...

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March 11, 1995
Issue #59

This edition contains:

1. *Mezuzah* — Which Way is UP??
2. This Week's Riddle

S. Aaron Skiles CDT from West Point USMA wrote:

*What is the meaning behind placing the mezuzah in the doorway at a slant or angle?
Is it always done that way, or can it be placed upright and vertical?*

Dear S. Aaron,

The Gemara says that a *mezuzah* attached in a way that looks like a "nagar" is invalid. Rashi defines "nagar" as a sideways bolt. According to this, a *mezuzah* placed sideways would be invalid. Rather, one should place it straight up and down, so that someone walking in could read it.

Rabbenu Tam disagrees. He defines "Nagar" as a vertical bolt. He writes that placing a *mezuzah* upright would be disrespectful, comparable to burying a person in a standing position. Rather, the *mezuzah* should be placed like the Tablets were placed in the Holy Ark -- horizontally.

The Shulchan Aruch rules according to the opinion of Rashi -- that the *mezuzah* should be placed vertically. This is the accepted Sefardic practice and this is also the ruling of the Vilna Gaon.

The Rama, however, cites the opinion of Rabbenu Tam, that a vertical *mezuzah* is invalid. Taking this opinion into consideration, he states that the best way is to put the *mezuzah* on a slant, with the word "Shma" towards the inside. Since the *mezuzah* is neither vertical nor horizontal, it is valid according to both opinions.

I once heard a beautiful explanation of the symbolism of the slanting *mezuzah*: The *mezuzah* is placed on the door of the house - the house being the abode of husband and wife. The slanting *mezuzah* "teaches" every couple how to create "Shalom Bayit" - tranquillity in the home. Each one should be prepared to compromise and "bend towards the other" in helping to lead a harmonious family life.

Speaking of Shalom Bayit, did you hear about the newlywed who surprised his wife on Friday night by bringing home a guest for the Shabbat meal. "We only have enough food for one serving," his wife whispered. "Whatever you do, don't offer him a second helping." After the main course, however, the husband asked the guest if he wanted seconds. "Sure!" said the guest. "Well...er...on second thought, no thank you."

"How could you do that!?!?" said the wife after the guest had left. "I told you not to offer seconds!" "Ooh! I forgot!" said the husband.

"But didn't you feel me kicking you under the table?" asked the wife.

"It wasn't ME you were kicking..."

Sources:

- *Menachot* 33a, Rashi & Tosefot & Rosh.
- *Yoreh De'ah* 289:6 *Pitchei Teshuva* 9.
- *Aruch Hashulchan* 289:17,18.

This Week's Riddle

Which *mitzvah* comes only as a result of lack of intent on the part of the doer or someone acting on his behalf?

Hint: The answer is not the *mitzvah* of returning a lost object, since the *mitzvah* comes about for the finder as a result of lack of intent of a different person, i.e., the loser;

Also, the answer is not the *mitzvah* of bringing a *Chatat* — sin-offering — e.g., as atonement for an "unintentional" transgression of Shabbat, since the person did intend to do the action, although forgot that the action was forbidden on Shabbat, or forgot that the day was Shabbat.

Answer next week...

After Purim, the Rabbi needed rest

"The Rabbi" is planning a Pesach break starting after Issue #60, (which will be available beginning Motzei Shabbat March 18).

Please G-d, the Rabbi will be ready to answer your questions again in Issue #63, available after May 6. Issues #61 and #62 will be available *only* via InterNet.

If you have E-Mail and a question, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi for possible inclusion in a future edition. Just write your question using your E-Mail program, set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" and send it to ohr@jer1.co.il. We can't include all questions submitted, but we do try to respond to everyone.

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