

Mezuzah & Brachot for other foods and activities

Mezuzah

On the doorpost of every Jewish home rests a mezuzah. Some may think it's a dainty decoration or a good luck charm. Put one up to keep the evil spirits away! Actually, a mezuzah is a daily reminder — and a public declaration — of Jewish identity and faith. Having a mezuzah on the door post of each room means that whenever we move from one domain to another, we renew our consciousness of God's presence and act in a way that sanctifies His Name. Once learned, the lesson extends beyond our home and into all areas of life.

Though mezuzah literally means "doorpost," it refers to a scroll containing biblical verses. The mezuzah recalls the Exodus, when blood was smeared on the doorpost of Jewish homes so that God passed over during the plague of the first born. The scroll contains the first two paragraphs of the Shema, declaring the oneness of God, and tells us to *write these words on the doorpost of your house and on your gates* (Deut. 6:4-9). The second passage (Deut. 11:13-21) teaches that Jewish destiny, both individually and nationally, depends upon fulfilling God's will.

On the back of the scroll is a Hebrew name of God, *Shaddai*. This name is seen as an acronym for "Guardian of the Doors of Israel." (*Shin*, the first letter of this Name, often appears on the mezuzah case.) *Mezuzah* is also used to refer to the case the scroll is stored in. Unfortunately, many ornate cases containing invalid scrolls — or no scroll at all!

A *kosher* scroll is hand-written on parchment prepared from the skin of a kosher animal. A trained scribe, *sofer*, writes the words using special ink and a quill. A Xeroxed mezuzah is not kosher. Every letter and word must be correct; any mistakes or missing letters invalidates the entire parchment.

Which Doorway Needs a Mezuzah?

In practice, we put a mezuzah on most doors that people use. Therefore, a Jewish home typically has mezuzot on the front and side doors, porch, bedrooms, living room, playroom, etc. A bathroom does not get a mezuzah. Closets and other small spaces that are not large enough to be used for normal living do not need a mezuzah. There is some debate on this point as well as with garages and laundry rooms. Room openings without a top frame do not need a mezuzah. Public buildings do not technically need a mezuzah, but often have them out of custom.

Mounting the Mezuzah and Reciting the Blessing

The mezuzah should be positioned on the right hand side of the doorway as you enter the home. On interiors doors, the right hand side is determined by drawing a path from the closest exterior door. Place the mezuzah about two-thirds of the way up and angled inwards.

Before reciting the blessing, the case with the mezuzah enclosed should be held against the doorpost — ready to turn the first screw or tap in the first nail. If using glue or foam tape, be prepared to firmly affix the case on the doorpost immediately upon completing the blessing. Once the mezuzah is in position, but before affixing it to the door, the following blessings are recited:

ברוך אתה יי א-להינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציונו לקבוע מזוזה.

Blessed are You LORD, Ruler of the world, Who sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us to affix a mezuzah.

ברוך אתה יי א-להינו מלך העולם ששהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Blessed are You LORD, Ruler of the world, who has given us life, sustained us and brought us to this time.

If you are hanging many mezuzot at the same time, only one blessing is recited on the first mezuzah — usually the front door. When making the blessing, have in mind the remaining mezuzot, and try not to make any interruptions until all the mezuzot are affixed.

Brachot for Foods and Experiences

Brachot are blessings that we say over food and other experiences. They are tools for transcendence. Like all meditations, they do not work by magic. A person who says them mechanically will gain little. When said with concentration, they become a daily source of amazement.

General Rules for a Bracha

One must say a Bracha on ANY amount of food. You should see the food before reciting the Bracha. You should hold it in your hand. One must be very careful not to mention God's name in vain; before you start, you should know which Bracha is correct. Between the Bracha and eating don't talk or even wait any amount of time. If you forgot to say a Bracha before eating, as long as you still have some food left, say the Bracha.

Brachot Transliteration & Translation

Each blessing begins:

Blessed Are You God, our Lord, Ruler of the World

ברוך אתה יי א-להינו מלך העולם
baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech haolam

The endings depend on what is to be eaten or drunk:

Fruit which grows on Trees: who creates the fruit of the tree.

בורא פרי העץ.

Fruit which grows on the Ground: who creates the fruit of the earth.

בורא פרי האדמה.

Meat, Fish, Eggs, Cheese, etc., or drinking any Liquor except Wine: by whose word all things exist.

שהכל נהיה בדברו.

After any of these foods: who creates innumerable living beings with their wants. We thank You for all the means that You have created to sustain the life of each of them. Blessed are You who is the life of all worlds.

בורא נפשות רבות וחסרון, על כל מה שבראת להחיות בהם נפש כל חי ברוך חי העולמים.

The following are blessings said on special occasions. They begin the same as the others above.

<i>Lightening, Falling Stars, Mountains or Deserts:</i> who has made creation.	עושה מעשה בראשית.
<i>Thunder:</i> whose strength and might fill the world.	שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם.
<i>Sight of the Sea:</i> who has made the great sea.	שעשה את הים הגדול.
<i>Beautiful Trees, Animals or People:</i> who has such as these in His world.	שפכה לו בעולמו.
<i>Rainbow:</i> who remembers the covenant, is faithful to it and keeps His word.	זוכר הברית, ונאמן בבריתו, וקיים במאמרו.
<i>Seeing a Torah Sage:</i> who has imparted of His wisdom to those that revere Him.	שחלק מהחכמתו ליראיו.
<i>Seeing distinguished secular scholars:</i> who has given of His wisdom to mortals.	שנתן מהחכמתו לבשר ודם.
<i>Seeing a King and his Court:</i> who has given of His glory to mortals.	שנתן מכבודו לבשר ודם.
<i>Seeing unusually formed people:</i> who varies the form of creatures.	משנה הבריות.
<i>Hearing good news:</i> who is good and makes goodness.	הטוב והמטיב
<i>Hearing bad news:</i> who is a true judge.	דין האמת
<i>Special moments:</i> who has given us life, sustained us and brought us to this time.	שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

Gomel

When a person returns to services after a life threatening illness or experience, they have an aliyah and say the following thanks which is answered by the congregation. It begins with the standard blessing formula.

Who bestows good beyond deserving, and has bestowed good to me.
May the one who bestowed good to you always do so.

הגומל לחיבים טובות שגמלני כל טוב
מי שגמלך כל טוב תמיד וגמלך כל טוב סלה