

Mezuzah Matters

In last week's essay on the Kashrut of quail, I noted that the London Beth Din does not permit quail eggs and states on the KLBD website that the Beth Din cannot verify a continuous tradition of the local eggs being kosher. I understand, though, that quail eggs are served at events supervised under the Federation. It is important to note that these eggs are sourced directly from a farm where the species of quail is approved.

I'm often asked questions about mezuzot and this week, while the Lawrence family is in the midst of moving house a number of mezuzah matters come to mind.

Mezuzot should be on all doorways to almost all rooms in a house, not just the front door. A doorway in halacha is defined by two uprights and a lintel across the top. This includes archways between rooms (as long as the vertical uprights are 80cms before they begin to curve).

Gates without a lintel (which is common on garden gates) don't require a mezuzah. Garages do.

Toilets and bathrooms should not have a mezuzah.

If a room is smaller than 4 cubits by 4 cubits (about 6' by 6'), it does not need a mezuzah. This determines whether utility rooms and laundry rooms need.

The mezuzah should be placed on the right hand doorpost entering the house. It should be angled into the room and within the top third of the doorway. With interconnecting rooms, there are two traditions concerning which room's right-hand doorpost should be used. One is that it should be on the right hand side of the doorpost where the door opens away from you. The other is that it is on the right hand doorpost of the room leading into a more important room. Bedrooms and dining rooms count as "important". Where there are multiple doorways (such as onto a patio or garden) each requires a mezuzah. The house is more important than the garden, so the mezuzah should be on the right hand side coming in from the garden

On sliding doors, some place the mezuzah on the permanent wall to the right. However, if the door slides to the right, it is preferable to place it on the left hand side of the sliding partition itself as this forms the right hand doorpost when you walk through!

When you leave a property which will subsequently be occupied by Jewish people, your mezuzot should be left behind on the doors. If you have particularly valuable mezuzot, they can be replaced with cheaper ones (so long as they are kosher). If the new family wish to bring their own mezuzot, then you can take yours away.

In Israel, mezuzot have to be put up on the day of occupancy. In Diaspora one can delay for up to a month. This is because we hold that all houses in Israel are permanent but in Diaspora they are considered temporary. The notable exception to the rule is a Sukka. As this is by definition temporary, even in Israel it needs no mezuzah.

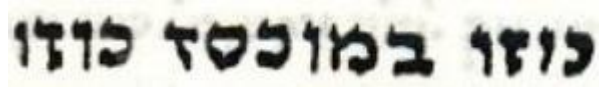
Mezuzot should be checked periodically (twice every seven years). Mezuzot which are on outside doors are particularly vulnerable to changes in temperature and moisture which can affect the parchment and the ink. It's preferable to place them in sealed cases.

Checking should be undertaken by a qualified Sofer. At Kinloss, we use Rabbi Bennaroch (020 8922 5958).

...And finally, some Mezuzah trivia. You know that the mezuzah contains two paragraphs from the Torah ("Shema" Devarim 6:4-9 and "Vehaya" Devarim 11:13-21). These are the Biblical sources of the mitzvah.

You've probably seen the outside of a rolled mezuzah and noticed the "Shin Daled Yud", one of the holy names of G-d.

Also on outside of a mezuzah and written upside down is the strange expression KUZU BMUKSZ KUZU. In fact these are the letters Khaf Vav Zayin Khaf, Bet Mem Vav Khaf Samech Zayin, Khaf Vav Zayin Khaf. It's a "code". If you go back one letter this transposes to Yud Hay Vav Hay, Aleph Lamed Hay Yud Nun Vav, Yud Hay Vav Hay – more familiar words – Hashem Elokeynu Hashem.



Of course, it's not enough that our houses and doorways look Jewish from the outside; it's the Jewish life on the inside that matters. On the one hand the mezuzah represents Hashem's protection of our homes. On the other, it is a warning and reminder of the message of this week's parasha, that Hashem wishes to dwell amongst us, even within the privacy of our homes. What a prestigious houseguest we have. And what a responsibility to have a home that makes Him welcome!

And when we're unpacked, we very much look forward to the chance to host you!