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Who Should Learn Full-time and who Should Work?

Chassidus on the Parsha

Chassidus teaches that the word מזוזה contains with in the words זו and זה. Both words mean 'this', but זו is in the feminine form and זה is in the masculine form.

The Mezuzah therefore represents the union of male and female. In the cosmic sense, this refers to the union between Hashem and the Jewish people.

The feminine זו refers to the Jewish people, as alluded to in the Posuk זו עם יצרתי לי - "this nation I have created for Myself". The masculine זה refers to Hashem, as alluded to in the Posuk זה א-לי ואנוהו - "this is my G-d and I shall glorify Him".

In the male-female dynamic, the feminine serves as the Mekabel - the receiver. This refers to Kabbolas Ol, our surrender to Hashem to accept and follow His will completely and unconditionally.

The מ at the beginning of the word alludes to the Torah which was given over 40 days (the gematria of מ). More specifically it refers to Torah Shebaal Peh - the Mishna which begins and ends with a מ

מזוזה is also made up of the words זו מות meaning to move death away. Hashem is the source of life. When we connect ourselves to Him through our Kabbolas Ol and the study of Torah this pushes away negativity and death. This is the protection of the Mezuzah.

Halacha Analysis Sourcesx

1. Yoma 11b
2. Hilchos Tefillin, Mezuza and Sefer Torah 6:4
3. As understood by the Ta"z Yoreh Deah 287:3. The Rambam writes that it is not considered a door because it does not have a lintel. This can be understood that if the curvature of the arch were to be counted as part of the height of the doorway to make up the 10 Tefachim, the arch would be seen as doorposts rather than a lintel. This answers the question of the Kesef Mishna on the Rambam.
4. Yoreh Deah 287
5. Yoreh Deah 287:2
6. Be'er Hagolah, Ta"Z, Shach, Biur Hagr"a,
7. Orach Chaim 4:105:2
8. Megillah 4:12. See Tosfos Yoma 11b, Shach Yoreh Deah 289:4
9. Yalkut Yosef Yoreh Deah 285:77

Is the Torah ideal for a person to engage in full-time, long-term Torah study, or to go out and work for a living? Whilst this issue is currently being fiercely debated in Israel in a contemporary context, this matter was already debated by the sages of the Mishna.

Rabbi Yishmael teaches that even though a person is commanded to learn Torah constantly, as indicated in the verse לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפיך - "this book of the Torah should not move from your lips", a person is still obligated to work for a living. He evidences this from the verse in the second passage of the Shema ואספת דגנך - "you shall gather your grain". One fulfills their obligation to learn Torah by establishing fixed times in their day to learn.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai responded "if a person will plough at the time of ploughing, plant in the time of planting, harvest in the time of harvesting, thresh at the time of threshing and winnow when it is windy, what will become of his Torah study?".

In his view, working for a living is an impediment to Torah study. One who truly wishes to do the will of his Creator, should only occupy himself with the study of Torah and then, their work will be facilitated by others. The second passage of the Shema refers to those who do not devote themselves to the will of Hashem in constant Torah study and must take care of their own means of financial support.

This is indeed how Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai lived his own life. In the Gemara, Rabbi Shimon is the epitome of one who is described as תורתו אומנותו, his Torah study is his sole occupation.

Based on this discussion, Rabbi Chaim of Velozhen in Nefesh Hachim, explains one of the differences between the first and second passages of the Shema.

The first passage commands us to love Hashem בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך, "with all of your heart, with all of your soul and with all of your מאד." Chazal explain that מאד refers to a person's money. One who only studies Torah, sacrifices their money i.e. their financial standing, for the sake of Hashem.

The second passage of Shema refers to those who engage in "gathering your grain" i.e. pursuing a Parnasa. Their service of Hashem is בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם, "with all of your hearts and with all of your souls", but there is no mention of מאדכם, because they do not forgo their financial means.

With this understanding, we can explain a further difference between the two passages. Both passages refer to the Mitzvah of studying Torah as well as the Mitzvah of Tefillin, which is equated to all of the Mitzvos. But it refers to them in a different order.

In the first passage, the Mitzvah of Torah study - ושננתם לבניך "you shall teach it to your children", comes before the Mitzvah of Tefillin - וקשרתם לאות על ידיך "you shall tie them as a sign upon your arm…".

The second passage first states וקשרתם לאות על ידכם - "you shall tie them as a sign upon your arms…" after which it teaches ולמדתם אותם את בניכם - "you shall teach them to your children".

The first passage describes one for whom Torah is their occupation. Their primary service of Hashem is Torah study. The second passage addresses those who engage in earning a living. Their primary service of Hashem is through Mitzvos, giving Tzedaka and the like.

But who is supposed to live like the first passage, desisting from work and only pursuing the study of Torah? And who should follow the path of the second passage?

The Gemara concludes the debate with the following statement; הִרְבֵּה עָשׂוּ כְּרַבִּי יִשְׁמָעֵאל, וְעָלְתָה בְּיָדָן כְּרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחַי, וְלֹא עָלְתָה בְּיָדָן - "Many acted in accordance with Rabbi Yishmael and were successful (in their Torah study as well) and many acted in accordance with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and were not successful (even in their Torah study).

The Maharsha explains that Rabbi Shimon's path was only for exceptional Tzaddikim like him. The Chasam Sofer writes that these are the 36 Tzaddikim in each generation. Only a handful of unique individuals can succeed in living this way, but they are few in number and this is not the path for everyone else to try and follow. And so our sages teach יפה תורה עם דרך ארץ, Torah study is beautiful when accompanied by working. This idea is also conveyed by Rabbi Chaim of Velozhen.

This understanding is hinted to in the 2 passages of the Shema. The first passage which speaks to those for whom Toraso Umanuso is written in the singular form, for select individuals. The second passage, which requires us to "gather in your grain", is written in plural form, because it speaks to the Tzibbur.

The Sefas Emes explains the phraseology that those who tried to emulate Rabbi Shimon לא עלתה בידם. Literally this mean "it was not raised with their hands".

We were created in this physical world in order to elevate it. We do this by engaging in physicality in the pursuit of Parnasa and by doing so in accordance with the laws of Torah and with Kavana L'shem Shamayim. We also fulfill this purpose through the observance of Mitzvos. This is our primary Avodah in this world.

Those who isolate themselves from involvement in the material world, focusing solely of Torah study, do not raise up the physical world through their hands. But those who follow Rabbi Yishmael's path עלתה בידם. They fulfill their mission in this world, by elevating it through their hands and their handiwork.

In the times of Moshiach, once the world has been elevated and we all attain the level of Tzaddikim, we will successfully follow the path of Rabbi Shimon. Then, as the Rambam writes, the occupation of the entire world will be to pursue the knowledge of Hashem. But for now, we are meant to gather in our grain.

The Weekly Halacha Analysis

Where to Place a Mezuza on an Archway

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

To be obligated in a Mezuza, a doorway must be at least 10 Tefachim tall and at least 4 Tefachim wide. It must have two down-posts (referred to as Mezuzos) and a lintel (a Mashkof).

The Gemara[1] discusses whether a שער המדי requires a Mezuzah or not. This refers to doorways shaped like those built by the Medians, which were designed as archways. The sages refer to this as a כיפה, meaning a dome shape.

The Braisa teaches that according to Rabbi Meir, such a doorway requires a Mezuza, however, the sage exempt it from a Mezuza.

The Gemara clarifies, their argument refers to a doorway with a total height of 10 Tefachim, including the arched section. Rabbi Meir maintains that we theoretically view it as though the archway is cut out (חוקקין) of the sides up to the top point of the arch. As a result, its measurements qualify to require a Mezuza (Diagram 1). The Rabbis maintain that we do not apply this theoretical perspective, and so the doorway does not satisfy the required measurements. The Halacha follows the Chachamim.

But, in a case where the "legs" of the archway were at least 10 Tefachim tall, even the Rabbis would obligate the doorway in a Mezuza.

The Rishonim debate the meaning of this Gemara and the scenario that it is describing.

The Rambam[2] describes an archway as a doorway with two doorposts, with the arch on top serving as the lintel. According to the Rambam, the ten Tefachim "legs" refers to the straight part of the doorway, before it starts to arch. In his view, no part of the arch can be considered as part of the height of the door. Even if the archway is much taller than 10 Tefachim, it will not require a Mezuza unless the vertical doorposts are 10 Tefachim[3] (Diagram 2).

However, according to Rashi, the curvature of the arch can be included in the height of the doorway, up until the point that the width of the arch becomes less than 4 Tefachim wide. When the Gemara says that the Rabbi agree that an archway where the "legs" are at least 10 Tefachim requires a Mezuza, it means that there is at least 10 Tefachim from the ground up to the point where the curvature narrows to less than 4 Tefachim.

According to Rashi, any part of the curvature of the arch before it narrows to this point will be considered as part of the down-posts. The curvature from above this point is seen as the lintel (Diagram 3). According to Rashi, even if no part of the archway is vertical, it can still require a Mezuza.

The Tur[4] adopts the explanation of Rashi.

The Shulchan Aruch[5] writes that in a doorway that has two Mezuzos (down-posts) with an arch on top instead of the lintel, if the Mezuzos are 10 Tefachim or more, the doorway is obligated in a Mezuza. The Shulchan Aruch is ruling in accordance with the Rambam, that there must be at least 10 Tefachim of vertical upright posts, without including any of the curvature of the arch[6].

Even though the Shulchan Aruch rules like the Rambam, the Acharonim are concerned for the opinion of Rashi, particularly since the Tur rules like Rashi.

Even if a doorway would be exempt from a Mezuza according to the Rambam, one should still put up a Mezuza to satisfy the opinion of Rashi. In this case, one would do so without a blessing, because according to the Rambam the doorway is exempt and the blessing would be in vain.

The dilemma comes when there is a wide doorway which has 10 Tefachim of vertical posts. In this case, the doorway requires a Mezuza according to both Rambam and Rashi. The question is not whether it requires a Mezuza, but where the Mezuza should be placed.

In any type of doorway, the Mezuza should be placed at the bottom of the top third of the doorway. If it is below this point, the Mezuza will be invalid. If it is placed higher than the bottom of the top third, the placement is Kosher, since it is still within the top third, as long as it is not within 1 Tefach of the top of the door.

According to the Rambam, only the vertical down-posts are be counted as the height of the doorway. The entire arch is seen as the lintel. Therefore, one would place the Mezuza at the bottom of the top third of the down-post, even though when the height of the arch is included, the Mezuza would not be in the top third (Diagram 4).

According to Rashi, part of the curvature of the arch is still counted as part of the down-posts and counts towards the total height of the door. The Mezuza should be placed in the top third inclusive of this part of the arch. The Mezuza would be placed on the curvature itself (Diagram 5).

The position of the Mezuza for the Rambam would be too low according to the opinion of Rashi. Conversely, since the Rambam does not treat any of the curvature of the arch as part of the height of the doorway, but rather as the lintel, the Mezuza placed on the curvature would not only be at the wrong height, it would be on the lintel rather than the post.

The dilemma may not apply to a doorway that has a tall vertical posts and a small arch. In this case, the Mezuza can be placed on the vertical post (rather than on the curvature) at a height that is satisfactory according to both opinions. This is done by placing the Mezuza towards the top of the upright post – but not within 1 Tefach of the top, so that it will be in the top third of the total height inclusive of the arch.

The dilemma applies where the proportion and size of the posts and arch do not allow for the Mezuza to be placed in this manner.

The Ta"Z rules that in this case, the Mezuza should be placed two thirds up from the ground to the point where the archway narrows to 4 Tefachim, even if the Mezuza is on the curvature. Whilst this seems to be in accordance with Rashi, he argues that the Rambam would also consider this placement valid. His opinion is supported by Igros Moshe[7].

However, many Poskim write that one should place the Mezuza on the top third of the vertical post, in accordance with the Rambam. This is because the Shulchan Aruch rules like the Rambam as the primary opinion.

According to Ashkenazim, if a doorway is very tall, the Mezuza should be placed at shoulder height, rather than in the top third. This opinion is based on the Yerushalmi[8]. According to some this applies anytime that the top third of the door would be above shoulder height. According to others, it is only where the Mezuza is above normal eyesight. According to Sefardim, the Mezuza is always placed in the upper third, even if the doorway is very tall[9].

Based on this, if the archway that is subject to debate is very tall, for Ashkenazim, the Mezuza would be placed at shoulder height on the upright post, and would be satisfactory according to both opinions.

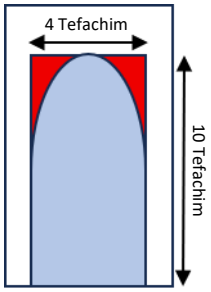

Diagram 1

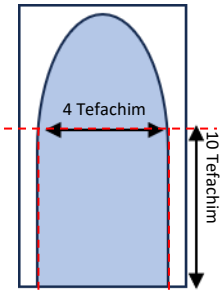

Diagram 2

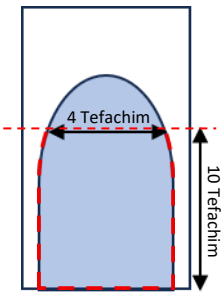

Diagram 3

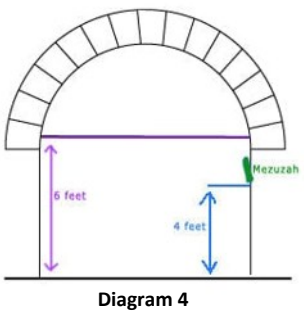

Diagram 4

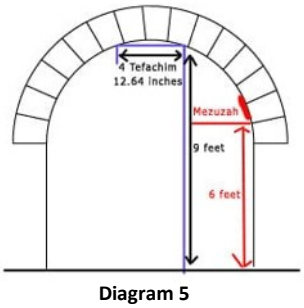

Diagram 5