

HALOCHOSCOPE

This week's question:

If someone is checking their *mezuzos*, he has two options: He could remove many and check them. When he replaces them, he will recite one *brocha*. Or he can check one at a time, reciting many *brochos*. Which is better?

The issues:

A) Removing a *mezuzah* from a door-post

B) Checking a *mezuzah*

C) When is the *brocha* required? Hefsek, interruption between a *brocha* and a *mitzvah*

A) Removing a *mezuzah* from a door-post

Part of the question is whether there is an advantage to leaving most of the doorways with their own *mezuzos*. If one removes each *mezuzah*, checks it, and returns it, only one doorway at a time is free of its *mezuzah*. In reality, he could even keep a spare *mezuzah* and put it up as he removes the current one. Then he could move from doorway to doorway, using his newly checked *mezuzah* each time to replace each current *mezuzah*. On the other hand, this will require a fresh *brocha* each time he puts up a *mezuzah*. If instead he removes as many as he knows he can check at one time, then puts them all back, he might not need to recite any *brochos*, or he might be able to recite one *brocha* on all of them. Although the first option does not involve reciting *brochos* in vain, it does involve actions that force one to recite extra *brochos*. While one should recite many *brochos* (there is an institution made by Dovid Hamelech to recite one hundred a day) he should rather not cause himself extra *brochos* where fewer would work as well.

The question is based on whether one should avoid leaving any doorway without a *mezuzah* for longer than necessary. In general, one may not leave a door-post that requires a *mezuzah* without the *mezuzah*. For this reason, it is imperative to return the *mezuzah* to its place if it is removed. If one is checking it, there is no choice but to remove it. If the checking process will be drawn out, many poskim maintain that one should affix a different *mezuzah*, at least temporarily. The basis for the restriction on removing a *mezuzah* is a Talmudic passage about a person moving out of a home, with a new resident moving in. The Talmud forbids removing a *mezuzah* from a rented property, when moving out. This applies even to the *mezuzah* affixed by this same tenant when he moved in. According to most of the explanations provided, this also applies to a seller. Based on some of the reasons for this Talmudic dictum, the rules for a resident ensuring that a *mezuzah* is on the door-post at all times is obvious. If it applies when the resident moves out, it should certainly apply while he lives there. If he moves out, he is no longer obliged in the *mitzvah* personally. At best, he is responsible for the doorway. If he lives there, he has a personal *mitzvah* to affix *mezuzos* to doorways, besides the spiritual rea-

sons for leaving them there.

The explanations why one should not remove a *mezuzah* are: (i) *Mezuzah* affords protection to the house. Removing it allows access to destructive forces. (ii) Some add, the incoming Jewish tenant will not be required to affix his *mezuzah* for thirty days. The outgoing tenant will be indirectly liable for any harm befalling the incoming tenant. According to this, if the incoming tenant or buyer will affix his *mezuzah* immediately, the restriction against removal is lifted. (iii) Removal of the *mezuzah* lowers the level of holiness on the door-post; *maalin bakodesh velo moridin*, one may not lower sanctity. (iv) Removal of the *mezuzah* removes the *Shechinah*, divine Presence, from the house, another manifestation of *horada bikedusha*. “House” in Scriptural, Talmudic and *halachic* contexts refers to a room as well. (v) It lowers the level of *kedusha* of the *mezuzah* itself. While attached to the door-post it is serving its holy purpose. This reasoning would allow moving it from one door-post to another. Accordingly, if one cannot get *mezuzos* for his new home, he may remove the old ones and affix them immediately in his new home.

The Talmud relates, King Munbaz took a *mezuzah* with him on his travels. He had no permanent residence, and wanted a memento of *mezuzah* wherever he went. However, he did not affix it to the door-post. He affixed it to a stick and placed it by the door. Some suggest that had he affixed it, he could not have removed it when he moved on. Even though he was clearly not obliged, as his lodging was of a very temporary nature, once attached, it could not be removed.

If a doorway is painted, the *mezuzah* must be removed. It may only be replaced when the paint has dried and there is no risk of damage to it from the chemicals. Similarly, if the next tenant will not respect the *mezuzah*, or if it is a gentile, the *mezuzah* may not be left on the doorway. While it is indeed dangerous to remove it, in these cases, the respect for the *mezuzah* itself takes precedence. [See Baba Metzia 101b-102a Avoda Zara 14a Yerushalmi Peah 1:1 Menachos 32b, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar YD 291:2, commentaries.]

B) Checking mezuzos

Checking *mezuzos* is also to show respect for them, but only in the immediate present. The purpose of checking is to put them back afterwards. The question is, how does one view their removal for checking? Is it really not considered a true removal, a temporary removal, an indefinite removal, or a conditional removal that might be permanent, depending on their status?

Since one plans to replace them as soon as they are checked, it could be viewed as simply opening them up to see their status. It so happens that this can only be done by removing them from their place. If so, when returning it, one would definitely not recite a new *brocha*. It was never really removed. If it is not really a removal, one would need to put it back immediately, and one could not switch it with another *mezuzah*. Most poskim do not require this. It is more like a temporary removal, since one needs to really remove it properly to check it. Until he finishes the job, which could take time, it is by definition not on its door-post. Accordingly, when replacing it, a new *brocha* could be required. This is debatable, since it was not meant to be removed permanently, when it is returned, it is put right back in its earlier status. We shall discuss this in more detail later. It could also be considered an indefinite removal, since one never knows how long it will take, or

whether it is kosher and will be returned. Or it could be considered a conditional or provisional removal. If it is indeed returned, perhaps one may view it as though it was never really removed. All of these possibilities bear on whether one need be concerned in any way for leaving the door-post without its *mezuzah* for any length of time. Perhaps one should delay checking until he is ready to do whatever it takes to return it immediately!

The Talmud says that a *mezuzah* on a private residence must be checked twice in seven years. On a public doorway, the *mezuzah* must be checked twice every fifty years. There are two reasons to check: it might have deteriorated or it might have been stolen. For the latter reason, one should actually glance at the *mezuzah* whenever he passes it. There is a common practice to place one's hand on the *mezuzah*, and many also kiss it. This ensures that the case is intact. It is still possible that the *mezuzah* was stolen, though unlikely. The second reason requires opening it up and examining the lettering. Due to conditions, some locations are conducive to deterioration in a shorter time period. Checking is an obligation, because one may not rely on status quo. The natural deterioration of the materials is always a concern. Nowadays, the *mezuzah* can be wrapped and protected somewhat. However, it will still deteriorate eventually. Depending on the damage, some *mezuzos* can be fixed, while others will need to be replaced.

The obligation to check would seem to apply to the resident, who has the obligation to affix, even if the *mezuzah* does not belong to him. The point of checking is to ensure that the *mitzvah* is being performed correctly. [See Yuma 11a, Poskim. Tur Sh Ar YD 191:1, commentaries. Chovas Hadar 1:8 11:14.]

C) The *brocha*; *hefsek* and *masiach daas*

Between a *brocha* before performing a *mitzvah*, one may not interrupt, unless he needs to ask for something related to the *mitzvah*. If one did interrupt, he has broken the connection between the *brocha* and the *mitzvah*. He is required to repeat the *brocha*. Generally, a *hefsek* breaks the continuity. In cases where it is permitted, it is considered as though the continuity has not been broken. Usually, this is due to the insignificance of the interruption, or to the level of importance, or lack thereof, of the continuity. In addition, by interrupting one often causes *hesech daas*, a distraction from the matter at hand. This can be subconscious, or overt. By doing something totally unrelated, such as holding a conversation or getting involved in an activity, one loses his focus on the matter at hand. He could not fulfill his obligation to the first activity while occupied in the second.

Our case involves a slightly different aspect of *hefsek* or *masiach daas*. The *brocha* on affixing a *mezuzah* is a *birchas hamitzvah*. The *mitzvah* is an extended activity, involving an initial act and a long passive situation following it. The Scriptural *mitzvah* is to write the *mezuzah*. There is no *brocha* at that point, because the *mitzvah* is not being fulfilled yet. The act is affixing the *mezuzah*, reflected in the language used in the *brocha*. However, the language used by the Torah indicates that the performance of the *mitzvah* is of a more passive nature. This is also part of the issue with leaving the doorposts without the *mezuzos*. The *brocha* refers to the initial act, but it is on the extended situation as well. Therefore, the issue can arise with an interruption in the extended situation. If it is indeed interrupted, one would recite a fresh *brocha* when affixing it again. If one does not consider the interruption a real *hefsek*, the initial *brocha* is still valid.

A comparison is drawn to the *brocha* on a *talis* and *tefilin*. They are removed when entering a rest-room. When one comes out and replaces them, should he recite a fresh *brocha*? Some poskim maintain that he must recite a fresh *brocha*. He was forced to break in the *mitzvah*, so this counts as a full *hesech daas*. Others disagree. He knew that this was a temporary removal, and he fully intended to put it back immediately afterwards. The consensus of *Ashkenazic* poskim is that he should not recite it in this case. It is so obvious that he did not mean to leave it off for any period, but he had to take this break. Thus it is not a *hefsek* or *masiach daas*. If his *talis* fell off during *davening*, when he puts it back on, he must recite a fresh *brocha*. He did not purposely remove it with the intent to put it back. The interruption in the extended passive state is considered a break.

By similar reasoning the poskim debate whether one who removed his *mezuzos* for checking must recite a fresh *brocha* when returning them. If he switches them around, he must recite a fresh *brocha*. He cannot claim that he was not *masiach daas*, since a totally different *mezuzah* is being replaced there. If he returns it immediately, some maintain that this case is identical with that of the *tefilin*. Others contend that since the *mezuzah* might be found to be invalid, one may not claim that he intends to return it immediately. Furthermore, the removal here is not to do something minor like removing a *talis* to go to the bathroom. That would be like removing the *mezuzah* to adjust something, such as to take a bulky item through the doorway. Here, it is removed in order to do something with the *mezuzah*. Others invoke this very reasoning to exempt a new *brocha*, even according to those who require it on the *talis*. In that case, one cannot perform the *mitzvah* in the interim. In our case, this could be a part of the *mitzvah* performance, especially since writing it is the real *mitzvah*. The consensus is to refrain from a *brocha* if it is returned immediately. If it is given to a professional or it is left off for an extended time, such as overnight, one recites a fresh *brocha*.

In our case, if he checks each *mezuzah* separately, he need not recite a fresh *brocha*, according to many poskim. If he checks all of them together, this raises the chances of one being invalid. He might also return them to different doorways. He might also make a longer *hesech daas*. Therefore, he would recite a fresh *brocha*. However, although he interrupted (and will now perform) many *mitzvos* together, one *brocha* is sufficient for all the *mezuzos* returned. [See Tur Sh Ar OC 8:12-15 TZ, MA, commentaries. Pischei Teshuva YD 289:1. Leshon Limudim OC 9. Chovas Hadar 11:14-15, notes.]

In conclusion, he should rather remove many at once, as long no doorway will be left overnight without a *mezuzah*. This will save him from doubt about the *brocha*.

On the parsha ... Paroh .. said “Why, Moshe and Aharon, do you disturb the people from their actions?” And he said “Behold the people of the land are many, and you are stopping them from their suffering!” [5:4-5] Why did Paroh not wait for an answer to his question? Why did he reword it the second time? Why repeat himself? The first time, he accused them of interrupting the work. The second time, he realized that it would be considered multiple interruptions, due to the many people working. Moreover, the *hesech daas* was stopping the suffering totally!

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