

You May Be Missing Out if You Don't Observe This Hebrew Tradition

My friend got married this year—a year of many challenges. It's been a special journey for her, so I got her a special gift: a mezuzah.

In the Jewish world, that's not an uncommon gift as the couple is establishing a new home together, and on every doorpost of every traditional Jewish home one places a mezuzah. It's also appropriate, as it is customary to wish a newly married couple to build a bayit ne'eman b'yisrael, a faithful/enduring home in Israel. The home is the physical foundation of a family's faith, reverence for God and the Torah.

Normally, this would be perfectly normal. Except my friend "J" is not Jewish. In fact, she and her husband are Christian. They are Christians who love Israel and the Jewish people so much that I wanted to get them a gift that was not only from Israel and distinctly Jewish, but also something that's relatable and meaningful.

At its simplest, a mezuzah is a piece of parchment on which Biblical text is hand calligraphed by a scribe, specially trained and qualified to do so. Special indelible ink written with a distinctive quill pen are used. Typically, today, it's common to see the parchment placed inside a decorative case, and that affixed to the doorpost of the home. In a traditional Jewish home, a mezuzah is placed on every doorpost to a separate room inside the home as well.

Before it was common to use a decorative case, it was customary to carve an indent into the doorpost itself, and place the text inside that. But what is uniform in a traditional Jewish home is that the mezuzah is placed in the

upper third of the right doorpost entering the doorway. The decorative cases serve to add beauty to the obligation to observe this commandment, calling attention to the mezuzah in a distinctive way. It often bears the Hebrew letter "shin" (ש) representing one of God's names, "Shaddai." The three letters of this name are also an acronym for the Hebrew words that mean "Guardian of the doorways of Israel."

Jews and Christians of course relate to text of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 which is written first, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." As such, the custom to touch the mezuzah when passing through the door, and then kissing one's fingertips, is a demonstrative way in which we affirm this.

Jews place a mezuzah on the doorpost of their homes to fulfill the Biblical obligation/injunction. "And these things that I command you today shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you go on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your arm and they shall be an ornament between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

While I knew that the symbolism and text of the mezuzah would be meaningful to "J" and her husband "B" because of how they live in faith, there was something else that made it significant. Even though I haven't met "B" in person, I know that he has a huge heart for Israel. I had the privilege, through "J's" introduction last year, of including "B" praying for Israel in a Global Prayer for Israel that I hosted. "B" is from Congo. I didn't understand what he said because he prayed in Swahili. But I understood his passion for Israel in HOW he prayed. We clicked immediately, virtually, albeit still having not met.

Because of that, I also understand that the additional text that's included in the mezuzah from Deuteronomy 11:13-21 is also especially meaningful for their new home because it relates to observing God's commandments, and the blessings that God promises to the Jewish people including prolonging our days, and rain in the Land. My friends are living in Africa, running a ministry there, but with their eyes and hearts firmly focused north and east.

At it's simplest, the daily reminder of the mezuzah, whether it's just on the outside door, or on all the doors of the house, gives us pause momentarily to praise God. Jews and Christians cannot be more united on this simple but foundational awareness, even through the smallest and most mundane things in our lives. It's so fitting for a new couple to distinguish their home with these symbols and tradition that's Biblically ordained, and scripture to which Jews and Christians can relate.

But especially for my friends, Christians who are as deeply connected through their faith to the land and the people of Israel as they are, having that daily reminder of God's blessings in general, and specifically how that connects to His People in the Land, I pray that will be extra special.

When affixing the mezuzah we say a special blessing, reminding us that we're doing this not just to remember God's presence, but that He commanded us to do so. "Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to affix a mezuzah."

Last year, when my daughter and son-in-law moved into their first apartment that they owned, my son in law's affixing the mezuzah was extra meaningful. I prayed then for them, as I do now for "J" and "B," that the mezuzah will not just serve as a reminder of their faith and connection to Israel, but that it will have the property of a divine covering for them and their home, whether sitting in their house, and going outside, when

they go to sleep and when they wake up.

Please be in touch if this resonates and you'd like your own special mezuzah from Israel. {eo}

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. Throughout his life and career, he has become a respected bridge between Jews and Christians and serves as president of the Genesis 123 Foundation. He writes regularly on major Christian websites about Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He can be reached at firstpersonisrael@.

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