

KI SEITZEI (DEUTERONOMY 21:10-25:18)

The Changing of the Guard?

2006 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz

Timing is very important. It is not good enough to do the right thing; you must do the right thing at the right time.

For example, what is better, to pledge to charity and take your time to make good on your pledge, or not to pledge at all?

When you will make a vow to G-d, do not be late in paying it. For G-d will demand it of you, and you will have committed a sin. If you refrain in vowing, you will not have committed a sin. (Deuteronomy, 23:22-23)

There you have it. It is better not to vow than to vow and be late.

Late, when it comes to the fulfillment of vows, is defined as the passage of three Pilgrimage Festivals - Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. If you won't be able to fulfill your vow by then, don't make the vow in the first place.

Late has other definitions, depending upon the Mitzvah. Different Mitzvahs have different time requirements.

The Shema, which, according to the Torah, is recited "... *when you lie down and when you get up...*" (ibid, 6:6), must be said twice a day: The morning Shema is said within the first quarter of the daylight hours. The evening Shema must be recited before dawn. After those times, you've lost your opportunity to fulfill that Mitzvah.

Tzitzis, the fringes that the Torah requires to be placed upon a four-cornered garment, (See "Fringe Benefits" and "True Blue") are not required if you are wearing someone else's garment. However, if you borrow it for more than 30 days, you are required to put *Tzitzis* on the garment because people may begin to assume that it is yours.

A Mezuzah is not required on the doors of a rented home for the first thirty days, except in Israel, where it is required immediately. An owner-occupied house is obligated immediately.

A few hours after we closed on my house, my family went to the house, where I recited the blessing and we all spread out, putting up all the Mezuzahs within a few minutes. I made sure that every appropriate door in the house had a Mezuzah. The bathrooms, which are not, according to the Shulchan Aruch, an

“honorable residence,” are exempt from a Mezuzah. The storage shed in the back yard, on the other hand, does require a Mezuzah.

Last week my son surprised me with a new law that I had never heard.

You may recall from previous Torah Talks that I am a bit of a chicken farmer. (“Yerachmiel's Ark”) I have a chicken coop in my back yard, and, to avoid being too graphic, it is easy to understand that a chicken coop, like a bathroom, is not an appropriate place to hang a Mezuzah. Chickens are not known to be particularly fastidious about the cleanliness of their surroundings. Therefore, I never put up a Mezuzah on the front door of my coop.

I was wrong. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 286:1) rules very clearly that a coop, unlike a bathroom, does require a Mezuzah.

I began to wonder. What about protection? The Mezuzah is more than just a symbol of the fact that G-d protects us. According to our Sages, the presence of a Mezuzah actually contributes to that Divine protection. (See "Sheepskin or Cheapskin?") It has been said that the three-letter Name of G-d (spelled Shin-Dalet-Yud) that is written on the back of the Mezuzah consists of the initials for the phrase, Shomer D'losos Yisrael – “Guardian of Doors of Israel.” Does this mean, I mused, that for the last two years my chicken coop has been unprotected???

Actually, G-d's protection comes in various ways. We are required, for example, to take care of our health. We are supposed to keep ourselves safe. What about those of us who lack the knowledge, understanding, or maturity to take care of ourselves?

King David writes in Psalms (116:6) that “... *G-d is the Guardian of the Simple.*” For those of us who don't take proper care of ourselves, G-d takes the extra step of watching out for us as well. This verse is why we don't inoculate ourselves against every disease known to man or get complete physical exams every day. This is why we don't refrain from driving, walking on sidewalks, or taking airplanes. Life carries a certain element of risk. We take “normal” precautions to protect ourselves, and rely upon the fact that “*G-d is the Guardian of the Simple*” for the rest. We trust in G-d to provide the protection against those things that we don't know about.

(Some authorities have even taken the position that if someone is so careless as to ignore the warnings against smoking, he is not in violation of Jewish Law because “*G-d is the Guardian of the Simple*” – also translated as “...*Guardian of the **Fools.***” Other authorities maintain that the dangers of smoking are so

blatantly obvious that it is 100% forbidden to smoke. [See “Is Smoking Kosher?”] The bottom line really shouldn’t matter. Just don’t do it!!!)

Perhaps, I reasoned, I still had Divine Protection because I was too “simple/foolish” to be sufficiently well-versed in the Laws of Mezuzah to realize that I needed one. Since I didn’t know that I needed the Mezuzah for protection of my coop, maybe G-d provided the protection anyway!

In any event, I reasoned, now that I know the Law, I needed to purchase a new Mezuzah for my chicken coop. I didn’t want to rely upon the “*Guardian of the Simple*”; I wanted to give the job back to the “*Guardian of the Doors of Israel*.” I resolved to go out and buy that Mezuzah “...as soon as I can.”

Last Thursday, a few days after I learned of this rule, my son asked me a question: “So did you put up a Mezuzah yet?”

I was, to tell the truth, a bit embarrassed. I really had no justification for not having taken care of this immediately. There is no leeway on how much time you have to put up a Mezuzah. It should have gone up the day I bought the house, and it certainly should have gone up as soon as I learned that it had to be there!

Could that, I wonder, explain how it happened to be that late Thursday night a raccoon got into the coop, helping himself to two servings of fresh chicken, injuring two others???

The Mezuzah went up Friday afternoon. (Closing the proverbial barn door?) Apparently, there are also time limits on how long G-d lets you get away with being a fool!!

TORAH TALKKI SEITZEI (Deuteronomy 21:10-25:18)

Have a great Shabbos.

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