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MEZUZAH: PROTECTIVE AMULET OR RELIGIOUS SYMBOL?

Among those ideas enjoying wide circulation in the religious community, and an ominous popularity, is the conception of *mezuzah* as a protective device. Assigning mechanistic potency to the Biblical inscription appearing on the face of the parchment, as well as to the Divine name *Shaddai* on the outer side, this view imputes inherent defensive power to the very object of *mezuzah per se*, claiming for it deterrent effect against evil. Thus, the *mitsvah* appeals as a pressing practical expedient, addressed to the individual's concern for his personal physical security and that of his family. When taken to its extreme, this perspective calls for being "*bodek mezuzot*" (examining the condition of the inscription) in the wake of tragedy, suggesting that the unfortunate circumstances might be attributable to the inoperative defenses of an invalid *mezuzah*.

This perception of *mezuzah* has been widely popularized during the past several years in the literature of the Lubavitcher movement, particularly since the terrorist attack at Ma'alot in 1974, and more recently since Entebbe. One particular Chabad brochure, circulated in the wake of Ma'alot, calls upon Jews to marshal their spiritual "defenses," depicting specific *mitsvot*—and *mezuzah* is prominent among them¹—as "helmets," which "military strategy" advises² (a battlefield analogy which is more than figurative). Following the rescue at Entebbe, and a discourse by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in which the protective view was articulated in learned formulation,³ a student branch of the movement distributed a flyer suggesting that the ordeal of the hostages may be linked to the collective inefficacy of their *mezuzot*:

A *kosher mezuzah* on your door posts not only makes your house an abode for G-dliness, but is also your security measure even after you have left home for the day. And since all Jews are one large body, it increases the security of the entire Jewish nation. Due to the fact that most of the *mezuzot* in the homes of hostages, upon examination, were found to be defective, improperly placed or not on every door post, all Jews should check their *mezuzot* immediately.⁴

The protective perception of *mezuzah* is formulated in the mystical literature of the medieval period. It appears in works such as *Sefer Raziel*, associated with the thirteenth century ideology of German Hasidism; in the *Zohar*, the major work of the Kabbalah; and accedes to widespread influence via the sixteenth century teaching of the Ari with its strong anti-demonic element.⁵ But it is our purpose to examine whether this doctrine is consistent with the ideology of *Chazal*, as incorporated in tannaitic and amoraic literature. Our objective is to determine whether the protective view may not, indeed, constitute a radical departure from classic rabbinic thinking.

I. THE ISSUE DEFINED

When we refer to the protective view of *mezuzah*, whose controversiality we shall explore, we have in mind the belief in a mechanistic potency inherent within the *mezuzah* as an object—its *parshiyyot* (scriptural passages) or the name *Shaddai* inscribed upon it. Such a view is unique to a particular tendency in religious thought of a magical-mystical orientation, which depicts *mezuzah* as a screen against *shedim* (malevolent spirits).⁶ Our intention is not, of course, to question the protective benefits granted by Divine providence as a reward for the observance of *mitsvat mezuzah*, a fundamental traditional conception, applicable to the observance of *mitsvot* generally. Such reward, however, is not an effect generated by the *mitsvah*-object as such, nor by the *shem* (the Divine name) inscribed upon it, but a personal response of God acknowledging the merit of the *mekayyem ha-mitsvah* (the executor of the precept), whose religious commitment is reflected in his fulfillment of the commandment. An ongoing contemplation of the inscription affixed to the doorpost fosters a profound relationship with God, with its attendant provi-

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dential dividends. Nor do we question the psychological effect of *mitsvot* as deterrent of sin. Certainly one's regular contact with the *mezuzah* at his door contributes to a sustained religious consciousness, enhancing the prospect of virtuous behavior. At issue is the ascription of an *occult* potency to the *mezuzah*, which acts, allegedly, to shield a man against physical harm, a particular mystical conception, attributing protective power to the *heftsa shel mitsvah* (*mitsvah*-object) *per se*.

II. SOURCES

Biblical Passages

Mitsvat mezuzah appears in two Biblical passages. The context of the first of these passages (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) clearly points to an *instructional* role for the *mitsvah*; no protective function is in any way suggested. Calling upon the Israelite to devote his attention to the Divine unity and the love of God—"And these words which I command thee this day shall be upon thy heart"—the *parshah* formulates several practices intended to facilitate that end:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way . . . And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house . . .

The function of *mezuzah*, together with that of *tefillin*, is to arouse the religious consciousness, just as diligently teaching "these words" to one's children and regularly talking of them will serve to intensify and perpetuate one's commitment.

In fact, the affirmation of the unity principle (*Shema Yisrael . . .*), which opens the *parshah*, and the command to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might"—whatever the sacrifice, as Rabbi Akiva's martyrdom demonstrated⁷—would preclude a concern for one's physical security, even as a passing thought, in the process of implementing *mitsvat mezuzah*.⁸ The *mezuzah* is to be posted,

just as the *tefillin* are to be worn, as an expression of an exclusively spiritual sense of purpose. In this light, recourse to *mezuzah* as a device for self-protection is a distortion of its fundamental purpose.⁹

But even where material reward is linked with *mezuzah*—in the second passage (Deuteronomy 11:13-21)—as a benefit of, if not reward for, the *mitsvah* (“... that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children . . .”),^{9a} such recompense is a gesture of God’s beneficent hand (“*I* will give the rain of your land in its season . . . And *I* will give grass in thy fields . . .”). The *mezuzah* itself does not generate any benefit by the mere virtue of being positioned strategically at the doorway. Add to this the plain sense of the *parshah*, according to which long years are promised not specifically for *mitsvat mezuzah*, but for an all-embracing commitment to the totality of the Divine commandments.

In fact, the Torah implicitly rejects the notion that Divine names are possessed of inherent power,¹⁰ a strikingly unique position when viewed against the background of the literatures of the ancient world. Among the ancients, divine names were considered a source of supernatural power, which, if activated by the skilled magical practitioner, could control and coerce even the gods themselves, who were thought to be reliant for their strength on these secret name formulae.¹¹ The Torah, on the other hand, in its formulation of the monotheistic ideal, denies any such doctrine. God Himself is the exclusive source of all power, and His name(s) is in no way possessed of independent potency. Divine names merely designate God and serve to convey to the worshipper a sense of His closeness.¹²

A rejection of the doctrine of magical name-power was, in fact, communicated by God to Moses at the Burning Bush, according to several scholars.¹³ Having been asked to redeem the people, Moses puts the question to God:

Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them: The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me: What is His name? What shall I say unto them? (Exodus 3:13)

We have here an allusion on Moses' part to Egyptian name-magic, under whose influence the people had been enslaved. They will ask to know the *name* of their God, in order to tap its potency for theurgic use. To which God responds: "I shall be [present] as I shall be [present]" (*ibid.* 3:14). Let Israel know that I am no pagan deity, whose power is deftly drawn from the mystery of his name. I am a *personal* God, Who will be dynamically available to them and responsive to them in every crisis, out of a concerned awareness of their plight. Ironically, then, the protective notion, which imputes power to the *mezuzah* inscription itself, blunts one of the most distinctive features of the Torah's theological posture in its battle with ancient mythology.

*Tannaitic and Amoraic Sources*¹⁴

The protective perception of *mezuzah* does not appear in the tannaitic *midrashim*. In the *Sifrei* (Deuteronomy 6:9), *mezuzah*, together with *tefillin* and *tsitsit*, serve to foster the bond between God and Israel. Out of His love for Israel, God has "encompassed them with *mitsvot*," which serve the people as perpetual reminders of that love.¹⁵ God is particularly responsive to Israel, when she expresses her devotion to Him through these *mitsvot*, as reflected in a parable depicting Israel as a queen, "desirable" unto the king when adorned with her "jewelry."

The *Mekhilta* is emphatic in denying any protective interpretation in an analogous case—the blood sprinkled on the Israelite doorposts the night of the Exodus.¹⁶ Noting that God had instructed, "And the blood shall be for *you* as a sign" (Exodus 12:13), the *Mekhilta* (*ad loc.*) explicates the Divine intent: "As a sign for *you*, not as a sign for Me." Clearly, explains R. Ishmael, God, before Whom all is revealed, did not require blood at the entrances in order to distinguish the Israelite homes on that wrathful night.¹⁷ Rather, the sprinkling of the blood was an act expressive of obedience to the Divine command,¹⁸ a meritorious gesture, in reward for which "I shall appear," says God, "and have compassion¹⁹ for you" (*Mekhilta*, Exodus 12:13, 23).

The *Mekhilta* (Exodus 12:23), in fact, compares the two cases—the blood on the doorposts and the *parshiyyot* of our

mezuzah—in terms typical of classic rabbinic reasoning, measuring the respective weight of each as a *mitsvah*, not as an apotropaic rite. Raising the issue of Jewish suffering, the *Mekhilta* poses a question: Why is it that destruction never penetrated the Israelite homes in Egypt, which were sprinkled with blood (a *lesser mitsvah*, since it was applicable only on that single occasion, only at night and not in future generations), while suffering does befall Jewish homes through the ages, which are adorned with *mezuzah* (a *greater mitsvah*, since it comprises ten Divine names, is applicable through both day and night and for all generations)? Now, if the intent of the *Mekhilta* had been to weigh respective strengths of deflective power, rather than degrees of importance as a *mitsvah*, there would have been no significance to the frequency or infrequency with which each ritual applies. Clearly, there would be no reason for the blood on the doorposts on the night of the Exodus to have been considered relatively any less potent *by virtue of its inapplicability on any other occasion*; or, conversely, for *mezuzah* to be considered any more potent at a given moment *by virtue of its regularity*. It is obvious that both *mezuzah* and *dam* (the blood) are being evaluated by the *Mekhilta* for their respective importance as Divine commands—or religious experiences, if you will. The greater frequency of *mezuzah*, its perpetuity as a *mitsvah le-dorot*—even its incorporation of ten Divine names with their inspirational and instructional value—reflect a *mitsvah* deemed more vital and impactful in terms of drawing the Jew closer to God. No protective function is at all involved.

Particularly in its solution to the question—why Jewish suffering in the face of *mitsvat mezuzah*?—the *Mekhilta* makes clear that the fortunes of Israel are, after all, in no way tied to some special power of the *mezuzah*:

What is the cause? Our sins, as it is said: "But your sins have separated between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2)...

Mezuzah is effective as is any *mitsvah* only when its observance is indicative of a general devotion to the service of God. No particular *mitsvah*-act or *mitsvah*-object can generate a pro-

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protective effect, when a man is unworthy of Divine beneficence. And when he *is* worthy, it is God Who will protect him as a gesture of His personal concern. Thus the *Mekhilta* text depicts the circumstances in which evil is rendered impotent as attributable not to some inherent effect of the *mezuzah* itself or its Divine names, but, as the Biblical phrase itself would suggest, to a free act of the Divine will: "*He would not permit the mash-hit . . .*" (Exodus 12:23).²⁰

Nor do talmudic sources lend support to the protective view. One particular *baraita* (*Menahot* 43b), quoted as the theme of *mezuzah* by virtually all post-talmudic works dealing with the *mitsvah*, defines its effect exclusively in terms of moral restraint:

R. Eliezer ben Ya'akov says: Anyone who has *tefillin* upon his head and *tefillin* on his arm, *tsitsit* on his garment and a *mezuzah* at his entrance has a strong reinforcement against sin.²¹

A passage appearing in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Pe'ah* 1:1) might seem to suggest, at first blush, the protective potency of *mezuzah*. The account is related of Artavan, Parthian king (probably the V),²² who sent "*Rabbenu ha-Kadosh*" (ostensibly R. Judah ha-Nasi) a priceless jewel, requesting an item of comparable value in return. Rabbi, reciprocating, sent Artavan a *mezuzah*, to which the king reacted with disbelief: "The item I sent you was of immeasurable worth, and you send me something worth a pittance?" To this Rabbi replied:

Neither the things you nor I might desire [material wealth] are comparable to it [the *mezuzah*]; and, furthermore, what you have sent me requires my protection, whereas what I have sent you protects you, even while you sleep.²³

A surface reading of the above account could suggest the protective view; but this is not the case. The point Rabbi was expressing was not the mysterious potency of a religious inscription—though to a pagan king this might have been the *superficial* sense; rather, the enlightening spiritual effect of the words of Torah, represented by and articulated within the passages of the *mezuzah*,²⁴ as well as their providential dividends when

adopted as the guide of one's life. This is confirmed by the verse cited by Rabbi at the conclusion of his response—"When thou walkest it shall lead thee, when thou liest down it shall watch over thee . . ." (Proverbs 6:22)—a passage which lauds the merit of wisdom or Torah study,^{24a} as is clear from the context of the *sugyah*, establishing the superiority of such study even over the practice of *mitsvot*.²⁵ Rabbi was far from any attempt at selling the mechanistic potency of a specific *ma'aseh mitsvah* or *heftsa shel mitsvah*. He was projecting the Torah, generally, as the key to an entire corpus of redemptive values.²⁶

The protective view of *mezuzah* is suggested in one talmudic passage (*Menahot* 33b), but as the *non*-normative position. The context is a statement of Rava to the effect that a *mezuzah* should be affixed to the doorpost within a handbreadth of the entrance. Two explanations are offered in the Talmud for this requirement:

Rabbanan say: That he encounter the *mezuzah* (the *mitsvah*) with immediacy. R. Hanina of Sura says: That [the *mezuzah*] protect [the entire house].

R. Hanina of Sura (sixth generation amora) explains the first-handbreadth principle in terms of the security of the home, whose interior is, apparently, maximally embraced by the power of the *mezuzah*, when it is positioned at the very threshold. Rabbanan, however, the collective majority, do not subscribe to this interpretation. For them, Rava's consideration is an enthusiasm for *mitsvot*, expressed in a desire to encounter the *mezuzah* with greatest immediacy as one enters the home. The predominant interpretation, then, implicitly denies any notion of a protective force generated by *mezuzah*.²⁷

The rejection of R. Hanina of Sura's rigidly apotropaic (or mechanistically protective) position, on the part of the *mesader ha-sugyah* (the talmudic editor of the passage), may, indeed, be inferred from a statement cited (*ibid.*) in immediate sequence to the Suran view:

Consider how the manner of mortal men is unlike that of the Holy One Blessed Be He. The manner of mortal men is such that a king

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dwells within [his palace], while his servants guard him from without. Not so the manner of the Holy One Blessed Be He, Whose servants dwell within [their homes], while He guards them from without. As it is said: "The Lord guards thee . . ." (Psalm 121:5).

Unlike the view of R. Hanina of Sura, this passage, quoted in the name of R. Hanina b. Hama, a student of R. Judah ha-Nasi, formulates a *providential* position, identifying the source of protection as God Himself, Whose presence is only *symbolized* by the *mezuzah*.²⁸ (In fact, title to the Divine protection is not associated by R. Hanina b. Hama with the specific fulfillment of *mitsvat mezuzah per se*, nor with the performance of any one particular *mitsvah*, for that matter, but with an all-inclusive commitment to the service of God, as suggested by his reference to the Lord's "servants," who dwell within.²⁹) By quoting R. Hanina b. Hama at this point, the *mesader ha-sugyah* appears to have intended, in effect, to override the mechanistic view of R. Hanina of Sura, either by *replacing* it with the more acceptable providential position or by *redefining* it innocuously in providential terms (contrary, of course, to R. Hanina of Sura's own intent).³⁰

Another talmudic passage (*Avodah Zarah* 11a) places the identical statement of R. Hanina b. Hama on the tongue of Onkeles the Proselyte. Onkeles is depicted as having succeeded in making Jews of successive troops of Roman soldiers sent to seize him following his conversion. In the final such encounter, the soldiers are attracted by the *mezuzah* on the doorpost, upon which Onkeles had placed his hand. Inquiring as to its significance, they are moved to conversion by his statement of God's protective concern for Israel. Here too no prophylactic power is attributed to the *mezuzah*-object as such. In fact, it is clear, as well, from Onkeles' earlier exchange with the troops that God Himself is the subject of discussion. Onkeles cites the Biblical passage depicting how God walked before Israel in the desert, "with a pillar of fire to give them light" (Exodus 13:21), which he contrasts with the distant air of a mortal king, who would never serve his people with any such gesture unbecoming his station. Be it His illumination of their way in the desert or His protection of their homes, God is a personally interested Guard-

ian of Israel, Whose concern is articulated in the inscription on the doorpost, a personal God, responsive to all who place their trust in Him.³¹

We have cited several *sugyot* to demonstrate that any surface impression suggesting the protective view of *mezuzah* does not stand up under investigation. There are, furthermore, several *sugyot* which implicitly exclude the protective notion. The case is cited (*Yoma* 11a) of an examiner of *mezuzot*, who was apprehended by the Roman quaestor while inspecting the *mezuzot* posted at the gates of the city of Sepphoris. The Talmud, noting that the authorities leveled a costly fine upon him, is disturbed by the issue of Divine justice, pointing to the principle of R. Eleazar, "Those engaged in a mission of *mitsvah* are immune to injury." Now, were *mezuzah* considered endowed with a distinctive, mechanistically-protective power, the Talmud would surely have pursued the issue in those terms, rather than confining its inquiry to the general providential principle of R. Eleazar.

Similarly, the talmudic criteria determining the schedule for examining a *mezuzah* (to insure that the inscription remains intact) betray indifference toward any notion of protection from evil as the function of the *mitsvah*. The *mezuzah* of an individual is to be inspected twice in seven years, and that of a community, twice in fifty years (*ibid.*). The rationale underlying these time intervals is based on a projection that the inscription is not likely to become altered in the interim, and therefore a *hezkat kashrut* (presumption of legitimacy) is established. Now, had the Talmud subscribed to the magical-mystical perception of *mezuzah* as an anti-demonic device, whose mysterious potency requires a flawless inscription,³² it surely would not have relied on the *probabilities* implicit in *hazakah*, but would have required a regular scrutiny of the parchment to guarantee the *fact* of a valid *mezuzah*.

The twice-in-fifty-years examination period prescribed for a public *mezuzah* (*ibid.*), as interpreted by several *rishonim*, is particularly irreconcilable with any protective notion. These commentators explain that no more frequent inspection schedule could have been realistically imposed on a community, because

its members tend, individually, to shirk public responsibility.³³ Now, were demonic incursions of concern, no such reasoning would have prevailed. Certainly, a concern for self-protection would have been expected to elicit the diligent participation of all. Clearly, the potency of the *mezuzah* inscription was not maintained by *Chazal*. A *hezkat kashrut*, the halakhic *presumption* of the integrity of the text, was deemed sufficient.

Similarly indicative of a lack of concern on the part of talmudic tradition for any protective role served by *mezuzah* are the several instances where a residence or particular rooms are absolved of the *mitsvah* because of structural or functional technicality. A severely arched doorway, for example, requires no *mezuzah* (*Eruvin* 11b, *Yoma* 11b); nor does a rented dwelling (outside of *Eretz Yisrael*) or hotel lodging, prior to thirty days (*Menahot* 44a). Add to this the predominant view amongst the *rishonim* to the effect that even following thirty days the obligation of the tenant, who does not own the residence, is only *mide-rabbanan* (rabbinic).³⁴ Certainly, had the halakhah perceived *mezuzah* as anti-demonic, the structure of the doorway would have been irrelevant in determining *hiyyuv mezuzah*; and a tenant too would have been obligated to affix one, or would at least have been advised to do so in the name of "*sakkanah*" (danger).³⁵ It is first the mystically-oriented legal literature following the period of the *rishonim* that introduces the suggestion that the tenant affix his *mezuzah* prior to thirty days for purposes of protection from "*mazikin*" (injurious spirits)—a recommendation which precipitates considerable controversy, raising the issue whether such a procedure might not, in fact, be inconsistent with particular halakhic norms.³⁶

The non-protective perception of *mezuzah* is reflected, as well, in a *baraita* (*Menahot* 32b), describing a pious practice of the house of Monobaz, ruler of Adiabene, who had converted to Judaism. During its travels, the royal entourage would carry with it a *mezuzah*, affixed to a staff, which would be set up in the doorway of any inn in which they might be lodging overnight. Although a transient residence is absolved of *mezuzah*, this practice was undertaken, explains the *baraita*, "*zekher li-mezuzah*" (as a remembrance of *mezuzah*), a devout effort to

perpetuate the *mitsvah* even when not actually operative. Clearly, were *mezuzah* perceived as endowed with an amulet-like potency, the *baraita* would have pointed to the motive of *she-mirah*, a protective concern.

The Mishnah (*Kelim* 17:16) makes reference to the practice of encasing a *mezuzah* within a staff, which *Tosefot Yom Tov* (seventeenth century commentary to the Mishnah) suggests was carried about in the belief that the procedure was "a *mitsvah* and self-protective."³⁷ The explanation, however, of the *mefor-eshei ha-Mishnah*, generally, such as R. Samson of Sens, Rosh and Bertinoro, omits any such interpretation. Consistent with the larger context of the Mishnah, which deals with illicit, deceptive practices, these commentators explain the purpose of the *mezuzah*, in this case, as a camouflage for contraband (such as jewelry) concealed within the staff.³⁸ Thus, no inference of a protective motive may legitimately be drawn. Indeed, even *Tosefot Yom Tov's* reading of the Mishnaic text,^{38a} differentiating the reference to *mezuzah* from the list of deceptive practices, does not compel a protective interpretation, since the staff might have been carried about simply *zekher li-mezuzah*, as in the case of the house of Monobaz, above. Finally, even if we were to account for the practice, as *Tosefot Yom Tov* suggests, in terms of the protective motive, this would not confirm the procedure as a normative one. R. David Hayyim Corin-aldi (eighteenth century, Italy) already observes, in reaction to the suggestion of *Tosefot Yom Tov*: "If there were such persons (carrying *mezuzah* about for self-protection) they were fools, comparable to those of whom Rambam wrote . . ."³⁹

We have demonstrated, then, that the Talmud nowhere (with the exception of one late view, overridden by the *sugyah*) ascribes prophylactic power to the *mezuzah* as such. Any protective benefits connected with *mezuzah* are manifestations of Divine providence, reward for the execution of the *mitsvah* and the contemplation of the principles contained in its inscription. In fact, the Divine promise of long years, with which *mitsvat mezuzah* is associated⁴⁰ in immediate sequence in Deuteronomy 11:20-21, is linked by the *Sifrei*⁴¹ (as well as one talmudic view⁴²) in more fundamental connection with the study of Torah

(*ibid.* 11:19), the previous referent, which is, after all, one of the principal values inscribed on the parchment. In an even broader sense, the promise of long life actually refers, in terms of the literal sense of the text, to the entire *parshah* (from verse 13),⁴³ and its benefits are granted for an all-embracing commitment to the Divine law, the classic rabbinic principle of *kabbalat ol mitsvot*.⁴⁴

Until this point, we have dealt with the implications of *fulfilling* the *mitsvah* of *mezuzah*, which, we have shown, is not depicted at all, either in the Torah or in the mainstream thought of *Chazal*, as a mechanistically-effective deterrent against evil. But the converse is also true. A *failure* to fulfill the *mitsvah* is nowhere said to expose a man defenselessly to affliction. The consequences of omitting *mezuzah* are framed in providential terms, as a possible forfeiture of the Divine promise of extended years. For even in terms of Divine providence, the Talmud indicates no substantive punishment for the failure to post a *mezuzah*, *unless a consistently deliberate circumvention or negation of the mitsvah is intended*.⁴⁵ The obligation of *mezuzah* involves, by halakhic definition, a *kiyyum aseh* (a positive performance), not an *issur aseh* (a culpable violation).⁴⁶ Thus, the suggestion, according to one talmudic view, that the death of children may be attributable to dereliction with respect to *mezuzah* (*Shabbat* 32b)⁴⁷ is not to be taken in simplistically literal terms.⁴⁸ No abrupt, punitive shortening of life is intended. Meiri notes⁴⁹ that it is a pedagogic method of *Chazal* to magnify the consequences of spiritual or moral laxity, in short, jolting statements, for maximum impact. R. Hillel Herz (seventeenth century, Poland) observes that a normal life span cannot be precluded for one who has omitted *mezuzah*, since there is no legitimate logical inference from the promise of *arikhat yamim* (extension of days) to *kitsur yamim* (diminution of days). The only valid inference is a retention of the life span as originally designed ("*lo yirbu ve-lo yitkatsru*").⁵⁰ Thus Meiri's further observation—which is borne out by the context and tone of the talmudic discussion (*ad loc.*)—that even in its most severe sense, any such punishment referred to in the *sugyah* applies to a defiant, categorical rejection of *mezuzah* in

principle, not to a case of laxity, and certainly not to a case of inadvertent error.⁵¹ Be that as it may, the issue is the quality of one's relationship with God, expressed in and fostered by a *mitsvah* such as *mezuzah*—not the operational condition of the *mezuzah* as a security device.

It is against this background that we must evaluate a passage in *Targum Yerushalmi* I (*Pseudo-Jonathan*), linking a soldier's failure to have fulfilled *mitsvat mezuzah* with threatening consequences on the battlefield. In translation of Deuteronomy 20:5, the Targum reads:

Who is the man who has built a new house, but has not affixed to it a *mezuzah* thereby completing it, let him go and return to his house, lest he incur guilt thereby and die in battle, and another man complete it.

As we have already noted, talmudic principle denies Divine punishment for the omission of a positive command, unless a consistently deliberate rejection of the *mitsvah* is intended. So that unless this Targum passage presumes such a negative motive, its position is inconsistent with our talmudic norm. Indeed, the very substance of the Targum's rendering of these several verses is, in fact, in conflict with the tannaitic as well as amoraic tradition,⁵² according to which the three categories of persons excused from the battlefield depart not because of any sin they have incurred,⁵³ but because of the special nature of their personal circumstances, warranting deferment from combat.⁵⁴ Be that as it may, the severe implications of an unaffixed *mezuzah* are depicted even in this passage in providential terms, as retribution by God for an unfulfilled obligation,⁵⁵ not in terms of any protective potency within the *mezuzah*-object.⁵⁶

Ominous implications are suggested for a missing *mezuzah* by an opinion of *Tosafot* in its exposition of a particular *baraita* (*Bava Metsia* 102a); but a formidable geonic consensus implicitly rejects this interpretation. The *baraita* in question prescribes that upon vacating a premises, one should not remove the *mezuzot* (considering that another party will be taking up residence there). The basis for this rule, argues *Tosafot*, is apotropaic: "Since injurious spirits enter a house lacking a *mezuzah*,

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removing it is tantamount to injuring those who will live in the house."⁵⁷ For R. Aha *Ba'al ha-She'iltot* and R. Hai Gaon, however, the *baraita* entertained no such considerations. To their mind the issue is a much more sober one—a concern for *bizayyon mitsvah*; it is deemed an affront to a functioning *mitsvah*-object that its service be prematurely terminated. Thus, R. Aha and R. Hai reason, if the *mezuzah* will be immediately installed (hence, put back into service) in his new residence, the vacating party is entitled to remove it.⁵⁸ There is, therefore, no compelling evidence for the protective position from this talmudic passage.

Nor is the protective function of *mezuzah* a valid inference from the following *baraita*:

If he hangs [the *mezuzah*] on a staff [against the doorway], or places it behind the doorway, it is a danger and no *mitsvah* (*Menahot* 32b).

Rashi accounts for the "danger" in terms of injurious spirits, which are free to attack a house whose *mezuzah* is not affixed within the doorway as halakhically required.⁵⁹ R. Tam, however, criticizes Rashi's understanding of the *baraita*, from a textual point of view, suggesting instead that the danger is a practical one—a *mezuzah* projecting in so awkward a position, as in either of the two cases described, is likely to cause a head injury to anyone passing through the entrance.⁶⁰ R. Tam's rejection of Rashi's view is upheld, in the literature of the medieval period, by the Ashkenazic halakhic consensus.⁶¹

We have established, then, that an examination of the classic literature of *Chazal*—tannaitic and amoraic material—yields no sound basis for the protective conception of *mezuzah*. With the exception of the overridden view of R. Hanina of Sura, the sources are either oblivious of any such notion, or implicitly deny the doctrine. No inherent potency is ascribed to the *parshiyot* (scriptural passages) of the *mezuzah*, not to mention the Divine name *Shaddai*, whose appearance on the outer side of the parchment is not even recorded as talmudic practice. The inscription of this name, which mystical sources consider critical for the efficacy of the protective function, emerged, in fact, no earlier than the geonic period,⁶² and is referred to in the literature of the *rishonim* as a custom rather than a normative re-

quirement.⁶³ Even those halakhic works—dating no earlier than the end of the thirteenth century—which record the mnemonic interpretation of *Shaddai* as *Shomer Dirat* (later, *Daltot*) *Yisrael* (Guardian of the Dwelling Place of the Israelite),⁶⁴ take it simply as a designation of God and attribute to it no potency.⁶⁵ Thus, the function of *mitsvat mezuzah* remained, during the talmudic period, an expression of commitment to and reliance upon God, a profound inner posture, in response to which the providential Divine hand promises its personally protective favor.

III EVALUATION

The protective view is rooted, of course, in a belief in *shedim* (malevolent spirits), a popular phenomenon in the talmudic period. However, even where they may have shared the common belief in the demonic, the rabbis of the Talmud never permitted the function of *mitsvot* to be interpreted in these terms. *Chazal* clearly separated the realm of religion from that of the occult. They never considered the phenomenon of *shedim* a theological category, to be countered by the allegedly anti-demonic potency of *mitsvot*.^{65a} The belief in evil spirits—a universal tendency amongst the intelligentsia as well as the masses, prior to the modern age—was a speculative attempt (not specifically Jewish) to come to terms with the severe realities of the human condition, such as illness, physical injury, mental derangement, death (phenomena which the modern mind understands in clearer terms as attributable to disease-producing microorganisms, human negligence, psycho-emotional strain, the natural aging process). Whatever procedures were prescribed by the empirical method in an effort to counter the feared demonic threat, such as the inscription of amulets and the pronouncement of incantations, *mitsvot* were not among them. *Mezuzah* was never seen by *Chazal* as an apotropaic ritual, any more than the contemporary rabbinic mind would view it as a potent defense against epidemic contagia or as an anti-terrorist device. The Jew today, like his talmudic predecessor, affixes a *mezuzah* to his doorpost, as he fulfills *mitsvot* generally, to express his

commitment to God, Who responds to the sincerity of that commitment with a promise of personal protective concern over his life. It is this providential response, originating in God, not in the *mitsvah*-object, that constitutes the source of our security—sustaining the physician's skilled therapeutic effort, supporting Israel's deft counter-guerrilla initiative, and intervening directly when human agency offers no hope. Thus, whether the nature of the threat be described as a "*shed*" or a virus, a "*mazik*" or a flesh-and-blood terrorist, it is the Divine hand, of whose favor one has been deemed worthy, coupled with competent human initiative, that thwarts its designs. Never did the classic rabbinic tradition consider the *mezuzah* inscription itself a source of protection.

A serious ideological difficulty plagues the protective view—namely, its corrosive implications for the quality of the God-man relationship. While the material experiences of our lives involve us in an impersonal cause-and-effect nexus—the inexorable necessity of natural law, the spiritual dimension of life transcends mechanical causation. The promise of religious experience must never be confused with the programmed effects of an automated security system. Certainly, *mitsvat mezuzah* has its formal requirements—*sirtut*, *otiiyyot ke-tsuratan*, *hekef gevil*, etc. (conditions intended to insure the quality of the inscription). But once properly constituted as a *heftsa shel mitsvah* (*mitsvah*-object), the *mezuzah* functions not as a self-sufficient apparatus, but as a vehicle of religious inspiration. Indeed, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The *otiiyyot* (letters), the *shemot* (Divine names), the *parshiiyyot* of the *mezuzah* are components of a conceptual system, communicating the fundamentals of Judaism—"amitah shel Torah,"⁶⁶ which thrusts the Jew, who ponders its content,⁶⁷ beyond his earthly circumstance into regions of spiritual encounter. Once rendezvous has been achieved, the booster vehicle is no longer consequential. The dynamic center of the *mitsvah* is not in the object (the *mezuzah*), but in the subject (the Jew), who has been inspired. The benefits accruing from *mezuzah* are measured not in terms of the potency of its letters as such, but in terms of the potency of the spirit which the letters have, hopefully, cultivated. And

it is, indeed, in the depth of the spiritual relationship—and only in that relationship—that the source of protection ultimately lies. Having encountered God, the Jew, to the degree that he has drawn meaning from the *mezuzah*, will be under the protective grace of His *hashgahah* (Divine providence).⁶⁸ The trouble with perceiving *mezuzah* as a protective device is that it replaces the depth quality of the religious experience with a technical gesture,⁶⁹ where the anticipated response comes not from a personally-concerned, omnipotent *Ribbono shel Olam*, Who acknowledges the inner commitment of the individual who has posted it, but from a mechanized instrument, which allegedly generates a defensive screen—for whom it may concern—provided, of course, it's in good working order!

One may argue that one element does not preclude the other, that the *mezuzah* itself yields a direct protective effect, *in addition* to its primary function of fostering a relationship with God. Indeed, are there not many *mitsvot* that provide material benefit? But this argument is not tenable. There is, to be sure, a category of *mitsvot* which produce direct material benefit—*mitsvot* such as *ma'akeh* (Deuteronomy 22:8), *lo ta'amod al dam re'ekha* (Leviticus 19:8), *tsedakah* (Leviticus 25:35-36; Deuteronomy 15:7-8), etc. But such *mitsvot*, rooted in a concern for safety, a sense of social responsibility, achieve their practical ends by marshalling man's *natural* capacities—his technical skill (to erect a secure parapet), his reservoir of moral courage (to save his fellow from death), his financial resources (to assist a needy neighbor)—in a dynamic human initiative. But the alleged power of *mezuzah* to provide material security does not tap the resourcefulness of the human initiative. It appeals rather to the sense of the occult in man, encouraging a passive reliance⁷⁰ on supposed mysterious forces latent in the inscription, rather than a responsible practical concern for realistic safety standards. (The reflex reaction of being "*bodek mezuzot*," examining the condition of the inscription in the wake of misfortune, such as illness or accident, can have the subtle effect of distracting the individual from sufficient attention to the contributory human factors underlying his circumstance.⁷¹) The halakhic concern for physical protection would require, in the

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interest of a secure home, measures such as the installation of a dependable lock on one's door, a reliable burglar alarm system, etc.—just as it prescribes the removal of a faulty ladder or vicious dog from one's premises⁷²—not the inscription of a *shem* (Divine name).

To claim that *mezuzah* functions in the same way as a secure door lock or a potent medicine—a kind of “super-*teva*”—is begging the question. Talmudic thought does not subscribe to the occult principle, according to which *shemot* and *mitsvot* generate a set of mysterious mechanistic forces.⁷³ Chazal speak of *mitsvot* channeling existing *natural* forces toward moral or spiritual ends, be they forces such as those of social responsibility, moral courage or technical know-how, noted above, or the forces of spiritual communion, which characterize the dynamics of the ritual *mitsvot*. Indeed, it is exclusively as a spiritual force that *mitsvot* such as *mezuzah* function, fostering a relationship between the Jew and God. Thus the parable cited earlier, depicting Israel as a queen, “desirable” unto her king when adorned with her “jewelry” (*mezuzah*, *tefillin*, *tsitsit*)⁷⁴—a relationship which yields an intensified religio-moral sensitivity, providing, as we have seen, “a strong reinforcement against sin.”⁷⁵

Clearly, *mezuzah*, together with *tefillin* and *tsitsit*, and *mitsvot* such as *tefillah* (prayer) and *keriat shema*, comprise initiatives of a spiritual nature, whose purpose is to elevate man beyond the short-range concern for his immediate material circumstance to a transcendent relationship with God, with its attendant enhancement of his consciousness of sin. *Mezuzah* is concerned with the *quality* of Jewish life, not its security. To claim, then, that the Divine inscription, which directs the attention of the Jew to God, is possessed of its own potency, generating protective benefits, perverts a spiritual instrumentality into a cultic charm.⁷⁶ It is precisely this type of conception which R. Samson Rafael Hirsch attacks in his *Nineteen Letters*, when he criticizes the kabbalistic position for its perception of *mitsvot* as a “magical mechanism,” a means of “influencing or resisting theological worlds and anti-worlds.”⁷⁷ A belief in the potency of the *shem* fits into neither of the two classic categories of *mitsvah* initiative we have referred to. It fosters neither the resourceful

practical effort toward physical security, nor the profoundly spiritual bond with God.

The point is that the only legitimate criterion by which the efficacy of *mitsvat mezuzah* should be measured is the depth relationship with God that it has inspired. While the technical accuracy of the inscription is important, to be sure, nonetheless, the consequences of a *pesul* (a disqualification) cannot be of such ominous proportions as the protective view would have us believe. The essence of the issue is this. If a Jew has affixed a *mezuzah* to his doorpost, thus—as far as he knows—having fulfilled the *mitsvah*, but unbeknown to him one of the letters is actually *pesulah* (invalid), or eventually becomes *pesulah*, by what perception of the man-God relationship can it be said that he is rendered defenseless thereby against the incursion of evil? Even in purely halakhic terms, if the parchment had been carefully checked before it was posted, the *mezuzah* would enjoy a *hezkat kashrut* (a presumption of legitimacy), requiring reexamination only twice in seven years.⁷⁸ But even if the parchment had *not* originally been checked, so that no *hazakah* was legitimately established, and the inscription was, in fact, faulty from the outset, the most that can be said is that the *mitsvah* has been unfulfilled; but such a circumstance is not classified as a sin—the obligation of *mezuzah* involves, by halakhic definition, a *kiyyum aseih*, not an *issur aseih*, as we have seen⁷⁹—nor is Divine punishment indicated, except where the omission reflects a conscious, consistently deliberate effort to circumvent or negate the *mitsvah*.⁸⁰ Thus, to contend that despite the honest intentions of the dweller and his freedom from culpability, he is, nonetheless, in a precarious state by virtue of inoperative defenses is to distort the religious concept into a form of magic.

It is one thing to fault a man who has failed to establish the legitimacy of the inscription for laxity, and adjudge his relationship with God diminished to the degree that he was negligent in seeing the *mitsvah* through properly (and yet, even on this count he may be innocent, having relied on some unreputable dealer); indeed, a *heftsa shel mitzvah* deserves and requires scrutiny in its production. But it is quite another to declare him defenseless by virtue of the technical deficiency, and then to

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compound the issue by suggesting the most dire consequences for his inadvertency,⁸¹ when the true theological yardstick should be the depth quality of his *shemirat mitzvot* (religious observance) generally, and his overall relationship with God. *Bedikat levavot* (an examination of hearts)—not *bedikat mezuzot*—is the classic Jewish response to the vicissitudes of life.

NOTES

1. In kabbalistic doctrine, all *mitzvot* were eventually assigned a mechanistic function as programmed elicitors of Divine forces; but *mezuzah* served a special apotropaic function in pre-kabbalistic mystical teaching. See below, note 5.

2. "The Five-Point Mitzvah Campaign," distributed by Mitzvah Campaign Headquarters, Lubavitch Youth Organization, 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, N. Y.

3. Published in *Likkutei Sihot* (*Ekev*, 5736).

4. "Jews and Miracles," Lubavitch Student Organization, Morristown, N. J. (When taken to its popular extreme, the *bedikat mezuzah* notion correlates specific physical disabilities with particular words on the *kelaf* [parchment] which are said to be *pesulot*.) Similarly, Aryeh Kaplan, in an article entitled "*Kutzo Shel Yud*—The Point of a Yud," *The Jewish Observer* (*Tishrei* 5736—Sept. 1975), published by Agudath Israel: "Whenever recurrent tragedy occurs in a house, our sages have prescribed a careful inspection of its *mezuzot*" (p. 29). Also reflective of the mechanistic protective view is a short story feature by Basya Lenchovsky, "Moshe's Secret," appearing in *Olomeinu* (*Tammuz* 5735—June 1975), the day school magazine published by Torah Umesorah, in which a severe storm levels all the tents at a religious summer camp, except for the one to which a *mezuzah* had been affixed; even though, as the author concedes, a temporary dwelling—the camp stay was three weeks—requires no *mezuzah*.

5. In a separate study, being prepared for publication, we treat the concept of *mezuzah* as it is developed in the mystical and kabbalistic literature of the medieval period.

6. The development of the apotropaic (or mechanistically protective) conception in kabbalistic sources is much more complex, involving the dynamics of celestial *sefirah* activity set into motion by the *mezuzah*. In a pre-kabbalistic work such as *Sefer Raziel*, on the other hand, the apotropaic function is a simpler, direct effect of the *Shaddai* inscription. See previous note.

7. *Berakhot* 61b. R. Akiva, at the moment of martyrdom, saw in his supreme sacrifice the ultimate fulfillment of the biblical command to love God "with all thy soul"—"even to the point of His taking thy soul."

8. Of course, this is not the fundamental issue. One could argue that granted, self-protection should not be one's *motive* in performing the *mitsvah*, but that nonetheless such protection, deriving from the *mezuzah*, is a by-product of the *mitsvah*. However, in the following paragraph of the text, we indicate that even as a post facto benefit, *shemirah* as a potency within the *mezuzah* has no basis in the Torah.

9. This is precisely the thrust of Rambam's critique of the protective view of *mezuzah*: "For . . . they have treated a major *mitsvah*, namely the [affirmation of the] unity of the name of the Holy One Blessed Be He . . . as if it were an amulet for their personal advantage . . ." (*Hilkhot Mezuzah* 5:4). His criticism is not confined to *mezuzot* featuring angelic and magical interpolations, but applies equally to a protective perception of the standard *mezuzah* (see *Haggahot Maimuniyyot*, *Hilkhot Tefillin*, 1:7).

9a. According to one talmudic view, the promise of long years relates specifically to *mitsvat mezuzah* with which it is linked in immediate sequence. But this view is not unanimous. See discussion below in the body of our paper.

10. In a study to be published shortly, this writer demonstrates that the rabbinic mainstream during the talmudic period rejected the notion of Divine-name potency. The limited number of talmudic aggadot and midrashic passages reflecting such a doctrine are shown to be overridden by the rabbinic consensus.

11. See J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Abridged Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 302-05.

12. The posture of the devotee in relation to God is altered by a belief in the power of the Divine name. The religionist who relies on an omnipotent personal God assumes a stance of *humility* before the Ultimate Source of power and grace, while the practitioner of rites involving the potency of the name assumes an assertive, self-assured posture, as a resourceful *manipulator* of Divine power! These conflicting orientations actually represent the conceptual distinction between mysticism and magic, the one cultivating a mood of surrender, the other fostering the dynamics of control. See E. Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Noonday, 1955), pp. 70-71.

13. See Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, trans. by Richard Scheimann (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 104-06. The latter reference is cited with concurrence by E. Urbach, *Emunot ve-De'ot Chazal* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1971), p. 103, n. 6.

14. Similarly, in the literature of the Hellenistic period, *mezuzah* bears no apotropaic interpretation. In the *Letter of Aristeeas*, 158, the *parshiyyot* of *mezuzah* serve as a "reminder" of the existence of God, Who Himself is "Ruler and Guardian" (157). In Josephus' *Antiquities*, "the principal blessings . . . received from God" are to be inscribed as a "remembrance" upon the doors (IV, 8:13). Note also Philo's formulation of the function of the inscription—that the people may "keep in perpetual memory what they should say and do, careful alike to do and to allow no injustice . . ." (*The Special Laws*, IV, 27, trans. by F. H. Colson, in *Philo* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954], Vol. VIII, p. 97).

15. See also *Menahot* 43b. Parallels to the "encompassment" passage of the *Sifrei* are found in *Tosefta Berakhot*, concluding citation (7:25), and at the close

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of TJ *Berakhot* 9:5.

16. See also U. Cassuto, *Perush al Sefer Shemot* (English: *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*), 12:5, 7, where, similarly, the apotropaic, cultic function of the blood is denied.

17. Although the previous *derashah* ("As a sign for you, not as a sign for Me") is not cited in the name of R. Ishmael, and, in fact, R. Ishmael (if the *Mekhilta's* *derashah* to Exodus 12:7 in the name of R. Simeon is actually his—see Meir Ish Shalom edition, p. 6a, note 3, and Malbim on this *derashah*, no. 34) may have held that the blood did serve to elicit a response from God ("[the blood] appearing to Me, not to others"), nonetheless, the underlying thrust is the same—the blood is not apotropaic or deflective. The nature of God's response to the blood is, as R. Ishmael explicates it in the passage we have cited in our text, an acknowledgment of Israel's obedience, reflected in the sprinkling of the blood.

18. The designation and sacrifice of the *korban pesah*, whose blood was sprinkled on the doorposts was critical for establishing Israel's worthiness for redemption (see *Mekhilta*, Exodus 12:6). R. Ishmael also links the worthiness of Israel to *akedat Yitzhak* (the binding of Isaac), whose sacrificial theme was symbolized, as well, by the blood on the doorposts (see *Mekhilta*, Exodus 12:13, 23). Similarly, later in the *Mekhilta* (Exodus 14:29), Israel's anticipated commitment to Torah and her exercise of *tefillah* (*Yalkut: tefillin*)—as well as her prospective fulfillment of *mezuzah* and *tefillin*—represent her "merit" before God, entitling her to safe passage through the Red Sea. No mechanistic effect is involved.

19. R. Ishmael interprets the terms "*u-fasahti*" (Exodus 12:13) and "*u-fasah*" (*ibid.* 12:23) as connoting compassion (see *Mekhilta* to these verses).

20. The anti-demonic role of *mezuzah* appears to be suggested in *Targum Shir ha-Shirim* (8:3), a post-talmudic source. However, even here the apotropaic tendency is qualified by the introduction of the providential principle. The demonic forces, maintains the Targum, "have no permission" to afflict, when *tefillin* and *mezuzah* are in place—a phrase which shifts the sense of the passage toward a personal Divine judgment in acknowledgment of the *merit* of the *mekayyem ha-mitsvah*. In contrast, the unadulterated apotropaic notion is expressed in a *Zohar Hadash* passage, where the *malakh hamash-hit* is deflected by the *Shad-dai* inscription, even though Providence *has* granted permission for attack (*Zohar Hadash*, ed. Ashlag, [London, 5730] p. 102, n. 457).

21. The reference to the saving angel, in the supportive verse (Psalm 34:8) quoted by the *baraita*, depicts the power of the *mitsvah* in a psychological sense, as channeling the individual away from sin. See *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, ed. Auerbach (Halberstadt, 1869), II, p. 80: "For each and every *mitsvah* is like an angel, protecting him from sin." (The latter explanatory statement does not appear, however, in the Albeck edition of the *Eshkol* [Jerusalem, 5695], I, p. 202.) Rambam (*Hilkhot Mezuzah* 6:13) and *Semag* (*Aseh* #3, developing the same theme, describe the *mitsvot* as "*mazkirin*" (reminders) of one's religious commitment. The Talmud (*Menahot* 44a), in a passage following the citation of the *baraita*, cor-

roborative of the restraining power of *mitsvot*, recounts the story of a man, who, at the point of committing *zenut*, was confronted by the strands of his *tsitsit*.

22. See observations of M. Mirkin, *Bereshit Rabbah*, Vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1971), pp. 63-64 ("Artavan . . .").

23. Note a *Yelandenu* passage, quoted in *Yalkut* II:879, where an analogous contrast is formulated between idols of silver and gold, which require the protection of their worshippers, and *God*, Who protects us while we are asleep in our homes.

The Rabbi-Artavan account also appears in *Bereshit Rabbah* 35:3. See also *Yalkut* (Deut. 844, Prov. 934), where the account appears, but without the clause, "even while you sleep." (On the significance of this clause, see n. 25, below.)

In the *She'iltot* (*Ekev*, 145), the story is related, with the unexpected addition of a sequel in which a *shed* possesses Artavan's daughter. No therapy avails until his posting of the *mezuzah* succeeds in banishing the spirit. This sequel appears in neither the talmudic or midrashic versions noted, nor in any other post-talmudic work quoting the account. The linguistic character of the segment, composed as it is in Hebrew, is obviously different from the Aramaic in which the body of the account is formulated.

Louis Ginzberg suggests that the author of the *She'iltot*, R. Aha himself, drew the *shed*-segment, an admittedly distinct component, from a Babylonian aggadic source, since it is reminiscent of the account depicting R. Simeon b. Yohai's healing of a demoniacally-possessed princess (recounted briefly in *Me'ilah* 17b)—though there is, he would grant, no textual affinity between the formulation of the two narratives (see Ginzberg, *Geonica*, I, pp. 82-83). But Ginzberg fails to consider that even if the general theme of demoniac possession has its parallel in this old aggadic tradition, the remedial recourse to *mezuzah*—a distinctively novel feature of the *She'iltot* segment—does not. Nor, as our study demonstrates, is there any evidence that the apotropaic function of *mezuzah*, generally, was developed earlier than the close of the talmudic period. So that there are, in reality, no grounds for identifying the *She'iltot* segment as having been drawn from the hoary Babylonian aggadah. To the contrary, considering the evidence we marshal below (re: *Bava Metsia* 102a) pointing to the non-apotropaic view of *mezuzah* held by R. Aha *Ba'al ha-She'iltot*, this segment is undoubtedly a later interpolation.

R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes suggests that the *shed*-segment might have been a part of the original source during the talmudic period, but was expunged from the final talmudic text prior to *hatimat ha-Talmud*, because it was found objectionable; the *She'iltot*, though, preserved the original text (see *Mevo ha-Talmud*, Ch. 31). However, as we have indicated, it is our view that there is no basis for an early dating of this segment.

24. Thus R. Tam (*Tosafot*, *Gittin* 6b) explains the talmudic term, "*amitah shel Torah*" (*Megillah* 16b), as a reference to *mezuzah*, since it contains in its inscription the fundamental theological principle of *kabbalat ol malkhut shamayim*. See also *Tosafot*, *Sotah* 17b and *Menahot* 32b.

24a. See *Sifrei*, *Deuteronomy* 6:7.

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25. It is in the identical sense that the verse is taken in *Sotah* 21a. (In fact, Rebbi's comment, "even while you sleep," probably alludes to the time of death, the figurative sense of "when thou liest down," at which time one's lifetime study of Torah will provide him with merit before the heavenly tribunal. The verse is so interpreted in *Sotah*, *ad loc.*, and *Bereshit Rabbah* 35:3, as well as *Sifrei*, Deuteronomy 6:7.) But even if the verse be taken as referring to *mitsvot ma'asiyyot*, as well as to Torah study, as it is in *Avot* 6:9, its point is to laud the enlightenment of Torah and its disciplinary impact. It certainly has no reference to some mysterious, physically-protective force latent in a *mitsvah*-object.

26. This sense of the account is reflected, as well, in a passage in *Midrash Devarim Rabbah* (ed. Lieberman, 2d ed., p. 71), where a consciousness of the content of the *parshiyot* is emphasized as central to *mitsvat mezuzah*. Citing Proverbs 8:34, where wisdom depicts the blessed man as hearkening to her, "watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors," the Midrash observes: "If you have fulfilled the precept of reading the *Shema*, of which it is written, 'When you lie down and when you rise up,' as you sit in your house, the Torah will speak in your defense in the Future World." Explains R. Aha b. Simon: "She will argue for your merit."

A conceptual interpretation of the account (in medieval rationalist terms) is developed by R. Abba Mari ben Joseph, late thirteenth-early fourteenth century leader of the so-called anti-rationalist forces in the Provence. In his *Minhat Kena'ot* (Pressburg, 1838), p. 11, he explains that the objective of R. Judah ha-Nasi was to urge Artavan to contemplate the primary philosophic truths, the existence of God and His unity, principles recorded in the *mezuzah*, which even a non-Jew is obligated to grasp in compliance with the Noahide law enjoining idolatry. This knowledge, R. Abba Mari explains, would procure for him the necessary providential protection. (R. Abba Mari, clearly no obscurantist as he was portrayed by scholars of the last generation, appreciated the primacy of a philosophic apprehension of God. He attacked only the *excesses* of rationalism, which had led to a denial altogether of the literal sense of Biblical narrative and law.)

27. Similarly, in *Shabbat* 22a, where the first handbreadth principle is cited in association with *mitsvat ner Hanukkah*, the sense of the *sugyah* suggests that purely halakhic considerations are involved. Specifically, the *sugyah* prohibits the placement of *ner Hanukkah*, if it is positioned outside the doorway, more than a handbreadth away from the entrance, where it would not be identified with the particular home whose proprietor had kindled it (see Rashi, *ad loc.*). The conclusion of the *sugyah*, stipulating that *mezuzah* and *ner Hanukkah* function as a corporate set of *mitsvot* at the doorway, "*ner Hanukkah at the left, mezuzah at the right*," suggests that the positioning of either *mitsvah*-object is based not on any apotropaic concern, but on experiential religious considerations; namely, that one be embraced by *mitsvot* as he enters the home. For there is certainly no intimation anywhere in the Talmud that *ner Hanukkah* functions apotropaically.

With respect to the talmudic passage in *Berakhot* 23b, pointing to *shemirah*

in connection with *tefillin* (depicting two sages who would carry their *tefillin* with them into the *bet ha-kisse* for protective reasons), the critical term "*ninteran*" (*netar*, to guard) appears not to be indigenous to the *sugyah*. The Munich manuscript omits it, while in other sources (see *Dikdukei Soferim*, *Berakhot*, p. 115, n. 70), including the texts of Rif and *Piskei Rid*, the reading is altogether different—"lo *natrah*" (*atrah*, to trouble). According to the latter reading, the sense of the *sugyah* is that R. Johanan and R. Nahman would not trouble their students to care for their *tefillin* while they were indisposed. Rashi, however, interprets the passage in terms of our reading—"ninteran" (third person, feminine, plural: "they will guard"), taking it apotropaically; namely, the *tefillin* "will protect me from the *mazikin*." (Rashi, indeed, is one of a minority of *rishonim* who interpret *mezuzah* apotropaically.) *Talmidei R. Jonah*, though, in exposition of a similar reading—"linteran" (see also *Dikdukei Soferim*, *ad loc.*), quotes "*yesh meforeshim*," who explain the passage as an affirmation by each of the sages that he will protect his *tefillin* (rather than any notion of the *tefillin* protecting their owner!).

28. This sense of the *ma'amar* is reflected, as well, in the *Devarim Rabbah* passage cited in note 26. Rather than use the term "*mezuzah*" to connote the inscription which might be considered to be guarding the house, the Midrash refers to "*mezuzah*" in its scriptural sense, as the doorpost, *protected by God*. See also earlier note 23, where a *Yelamdenu* passage depicts God as our Protector while we sleep in our homes.

29. See the *Devarim Rabbah* passage cited in note 26, where an overall consciousness of one's commitment to God, as depicted in the *parshiyot*, is critical to *mitsvat mezuzah*.

30. These two possible interpretations of the function served by R. Hanina b. Hama's statement, within the *sugyah*, are reflected in the literature of the *rishonim*. One group of *rishonim* omits the Suran view altogether, indicating their understanding of the *sugyah* as having rejected it. These *rishonim*, as a general rule, do not quote R. Hanina b. Hama's *ma'amar*, since their elimination of the Suran view accomplishes the objective of his providential statement (see *Semag*, *Mordecai*). A second group of *rishonim*, citing the Suran view along with the view of Rabbanan, immediately quotes R. Hanina b. Hama, in order to dissolve the mechanistically protective sense of the Suran position. These *rishonim* understand the thrust of the *sugyah* as intending to redefine or remold the Suran view into a symbolic statement; so that one could subscribe to the Suran statement without its rigorous apotropaic sense. The first-handbreadth requirement would no longer be deemed a critical factor in a protectively-potent procedure (as R. Hanina of Sura had originally intended) but simply a fitting, though in no way vital, symbol of God's personal protection, which, after all, does embrace the entire home (see Rif, *Rosh*). It is a minority stance in the literature of the *rishonim* which reverses the thrust of the *sugyah*, and attempts to interpret R. Hanina b. Hama's statement as consistent with the rigid, apotropaic sense of R. Hanina of Sura's *ma'amar*. (This is the position of the *Tur*, whose radical formulation thrust the apotropaic position to prominence.)

31. R. Moses ha-Kohen of Lunel (Ramakh), contemporary of Rambam and

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commentator on his *Mishneh Torah*, understands the Onkeles account as supporting the notion of a protective *mezuzah*-object, which would be in contradiction, Ramakh observes, to Rambam's critique of such a conception (see n. 9, above). He therefore suggests, in order to vindicate Rambam's position, that Onkeles' remarks were polemical, intended to "lend esteem to Israel," but were not expressive of systematic rabbinic thinking (see *Kesef Mishneh*, *Hilkhot Mezuzah* 5:4). It is possible to explain the Onkeles account as we have, as perceiving *mezuzah* symbolically (representative of God's personal protection), and yet to suggest, in line with Ramakh's point, that Onkeles' symbolic explanation could not help but be understood by non-abstracting pagans as depicting the protective effect of the object itself. Significantly, Ramiakh is unconcerned with the apotropaic implications of R. Hanina of Sura's position, undoubtedly because, as we have indicated, the *sugyah* overrides this view.

32. The severe implications of a defective inscription, according to kabbalistic doctrine, will be treated in a separate study (see above, note 5).

33. See Rashi, *ad loc.*; *Nimukei Yosef* on *Alfas*, *Hilkhot Mezuzah*; and *Mordecai*, *Halakhot Ketanot*, 969. In *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, ed. Auerbach, II, p. 79, R. Hai Gaon is cited as offering a contrary rationale; namely, a community *mezuzah* does not require as great a frequency of *bedikah*, because the public is regularly more careful in protecting it from conditions that might cause corrosion. In *Tosefot Yeshanim*, *Yoma* 11a, a third rationale is offered. The frequent examination of a public *mezuzah* is dangerous, exposing the *bodek* to a greater likelihood of apprehension by the alien authorities, as, in fact, transpired at the gates of the city of Sepphoris, in the account cited above in our text.

34. See *Tosafot*, *Menahot* 44a, second and concluding view, and *Tosafot*, *Avodah Zarah* 21a; also *Shitah Mekubetset*, *Bava Metsia* 101b, in name of Rosh and Ritva, the latter citing this position as that of Ri.

35. *Tosafot*, *Menahot* 44a, in its opening view, does invoke *shemirah* as the basis for its position that the tenant's obligation after thirty days is *mide-oraita*. However, even for this view of *Tosafot* (which is later superseded by its second and concluding position), the *shemirah* argument cannot obligate the tenant prior to thirty days.

36. See *Sedei Hemed*, Vol. 4, p. 242, where the view of R. Eleazar Rokeah (eighteenth century, Amsterdam), is cited, advising the procedure ("Let him not delay in affixing it, out of concern for the *mazikin*"). One issue raised by this practice is the halakhic legitimacy of a *mezuzah* fixed in place prematurely, with the related issue of *ta'aseh ve-lo min he-assui*, the ante facto construction of a *heftsa shel mitsvah* (see *Minhat Hinukh*, *Va-Ethanan*). The pronouncement of the *berakhah* in such a case is also at issue, with both the pre-thirty-day and post-thirty-day options fraught with halakhic complication. See *Sedei Hemed*, 4, pp. 239-42.

The pitfalls involved in any attempt at reconciling the apotropaic notion with the norms of the halakhah are reflected in *Sefat Emet* on *Shas*. The comment is first made that a transient residence (an inn), by virtue of the fact that it is halakhically absolved of *mezuzah*, is thereby immune to demonic attack, and, therefore, requires no protection (*perush* on *Menahot* 32b). Yet in a subse-

quent observation (*Menahot* 44a), *Sefat Emet* argues with inconsistency that the reason why rented quarters in *Eretz Yisrael*—for whose security we are especially concerned—had to be made subject to *hiyyuv mezuzah* immediately (even prior to thirty days, unlike residences *hutz la-arets*) was in order to assure that they be protected against an apparently indiscriminate demonic threat!

37. Commentary to Mishnah, *ad loc.*

38. See their respective commentaries to Mishnah, *ad loc.*

38a. Based on Rambam, *Hilkhhot Kelim* 2:2.

39. Cited in *Tosefot Anshei Shem* on Mishnah, *ad loc.* See above, n. 9.

40. Accordingly, one talmudic view, *Shabbat* 32b (see also *Massekhet Kallah, Vilna Shas*, 51a, second column), associates this reward specifically with *mezuzah*. But as we indicate below in note 43, the larger referents—*limmud Torah* and *kabbalat ol mitsvot* at large—are not excluded.

The linkage of long years specifically with *mezuzah* is the basis for the talmudic argument establishing the obligation of women in the *mitsvah*—"Do women not require life?" (*Kiddushin* 34a).

41. *Sifrei*, Deuteronomy 11:19; cited also by Rashi in paraphrase.

42. *Shabbat* 32b.

43. See I. Heinemann, *Darkhe ha-Aggadah* (Jerusalem, 5714), p. 136. Certainly, Chazal, in their midrashic association of proximate verses, did not intend to exclude the larger context of the *peshat*.

44. So that certainly the ideal fulfillment of *mitsvat mezuzah* is in a study of and commitment to the content of the entire *parshah*. See above, note 26.

45. This is the sense of the talmudic *sugyah* (*Menahot* 41a) analyzing a dialogue between Rav Ketina and an angel who had threatened him with punishment for failing to fulfill *mitsvat tsitsit*. The Talmud's conclusion is that Rav Ketina was subject to punishment for consistently circumventing *mitsvat tsitsit*, that is by intentionally, with regularity, donning garments that do not require *tsitsit*.

To dwell in a house requiring *mezuzah*, and yet to fail to affix one, would be comparable to actually wearing a garment requiring *tsitsit* without attaching them, clearly a more direct disregard for the *mitsvah* than the circumstances of Rav Ketina's omission. Yet, as is clear from *Tosafot* (*ad loc.*), punishment even in such a case would be applicable only if the negation of the *mitsvah* involved a consistent resistance to its fulfillment.

Similarly, the aggadic depiction (*Pesahim* 113b) of the man who does not observe *tefillin*, *tsitsit* and *mezuzah* as "excommunicated by Heaven" ("as if excommunicated by Heaven," a variant reading) is taken by *Tosafot* as referring to a situation where he possesses them but does not fulfill them, or where, as in the case of *tsitsit* (see R. Akiva Eger, *Gilyon ha-Shas*, *ad loc.*), he consistently avoids, as did Rav Ketina, creating conditions that would require *tsitsit*.

With regard to the talmudic passage (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 17a) identifying *poshe'ei yisrael be-gufan* (who suffer severely after death) as "*karkafta de-lo manah tefillin*" (those upon whose heads *tefillin* is not placed), the reading of our talmudic text supports R. Tam's interpretation (*ad loc.*, upheld by Rosh, as well, *ad loc.*) to the effect that this classification applies only "when the *mitsvah*

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is despicable in his eyes." Thus, a recent exhortative article in *The Jewish Observer* (referred to in n. 4, above) is misleading when it asserts, categorically, that the donning "through neglect" of *tefillin* that are *pesulot* renders a man *poshe'a yisrael be-gufo* (p. 30). It is true that R. Hananel, Rif and Rambam, according to their reading of the talmudic text, define *karkafta* as one who has never fulfilled the *mitsvah*, which might imply that even without disparagement of the *mitsvah* one is condemned, whatever the extenuating circumstances, for his failure ever to have donned *tefillin*. But this implication does not necessarily follow. The comment of Ran on Rif (*ad loc.*) would suggest that the latter's position is not inconsistent with the fundamental thrust of R. Tam's view; namely, *karkafta* would apply only if the lifetime failure to fulfill the *mitsvah* was associated with an element of conscious rejection. (Be that as it may, the application of the principle of *karkafta* by R. Hananel, Rif and Rambam appears to be limited to *tefillin*. It is only Ran, whose interpretation of the principle is, at any rate, a more liberal one, as we have seen, who extends its application as a broader category to other *mitsvot aseh*.)

46. See Mordecai, *Halakhot Ketanot*, 944. Mordecai cites this position in the name of R. Isaac of Dampierre (Ri), with respect to both *mezuzah* and *tsitsit*. See n. 79, below.

47. See also reference to *Massekhet Kallah* in n. 40, above.

48. See opening comment of *Tosafot*, *Kiddushin* 34a ("Gavra"), referring to the type of *derashah* formulated in this *sugyah* (*Shabbat* 32b) as "*asmakhta*," a *derashah* which does not claim for itself methodological rigor.

With few exceptions, the *rishonim*, in their *sifrei mitsvah* and compilations of *hilkhot mezuzah*, omit the talmudic reference to the death of children, formulating instead only the positive implications (*arikhat yamim*) of the observance of the *mitsvah*.

49. Meiri, *Beit ha-Behirah*, *Shabbat*, comment on 32a-33b.

50. *Beit Hillel* to *Shulhan Arukh*, *Yoreh De'ah*, 185:1. R. Herz points to the implicit rejection by another talmudic *sugyah* of any inference from *arikhat yamim* to *kitsur yamim*—the *sugyah* of *tenai kaful* (*Kiddushin* 61a-62a). In its treatment of Genesis 4:7, Leviticus 26:3 and Isaiah 1:19, exhortative scriptural passages similar to Deuteronomy 11:21, the Talmud indicates that neither for R. Meir, who altogether denies the legitimacy of any inference from a conditional statement, nor R. Hanina ben Gamaliel, who permits it, may an inference of punitive loss be drawn. Even for the latter position, only a forfeiture of the promise may be inferred.

It is of course true that the *Sifrei* (Deuteronomy 11:19) with respect to *limmud Torah*, draws the inference of *kitsur yamim*, but in an exhortative context such as this, phrases of this type are not necessarily to be taken in a rigorous sense. *Kitsur yamim* may very well refer to a "shortening" of the life span in terms of its *additional* potential segment, which has now been forfeited. Note also that the *Sifrei*, in the course of its development of the theme, employs the reference to death not as a prescription of punishment, but as an evaluative description in hyperbolic terms of the worthlessness of a life without Torah: "If he [the father] does not speak the holy tongue to him [his son], nor teach

him Torah, it is as if he were worthy of burying him." Similarly, the *Tosefta Hagigah* 1:2 says of a son whose father would fail to train him in the performance of *mitsvot*, as well as *Shema*, Torah and the holy tongue, "it is as if he were worthy of not having been born."

Rashi, citing the *Sifrei* in paraphrase, records the phrase "*lo yirbu*" in place of "*yiktseru*," while in Exodus 20:12 (with reference to *kibbud av va-em*), he, like the *Mekhilta*, uses the term "*yiktserun*." However, in his commentary to *Hullin* 110b, in explication of the principle of *mitsvat aseih she-mattan sekharah be-tsidah*, he states that in its promise of long years for *kibbud av va-em*, the Torah implicitly advises a son that if he does not fulfill the *mitsvah* his punishment will be that he "will not acquire this reward," clearly indicating Rashi's preference for the "*lo yirbu*" position.

51. This is indicated in Meiri's reference to "*perikat ol ha-mitsvah*" (*ad loc.*).

52. R. David Zvi Hoffmann takes note of the non-normative character of this Targum passage when he observes that in verse 6 the Targum prescribes the redemption of the fruit of the vine *from the priest*. According to talmudic tradition the priest has no such role (see D. Z. Hoffmann, *Commentary to Deuteronomy* 20:6 and *Leviticus* 19:24, 25). Nor, in fact, is the redemption of the fruit an absolute obligation. According to talmudic tradition, the fruit of the fourth year is to be eaten in Jerusalem; except that the farmer is permitted the option (considering the difficulty of transporting a large supply of goods) of exchanging the fruit for its value in money, which he would then take to Jerusalem for the purchase of items to be consumed in the city (see Rambam, *Hilkhot Ma'aser Shenii ve-Neta Reva'i*, 9:1, 2; 4:1).

53. R. Akiva denies entirely that a fear of the consequences of sin is grounds for exemption from battle (*Mishnah, Sotah* 8:5; *Sifrei* to Deuteronomy 20:8), a position adopted by Rambam in his *Mishneh Torah (Hilkhot Melakhim, Ch. 7)*. But even R. Jose ha-Gelili and R. Jose, who excuse the sinner from the battlefield on the basis of Deuteronomy 20:8 (*Mishnah, Sotah, ad loc.*, and talmudic discussion, *Sotah* 44b), do not interpret the three categories of Deuteronomy 20:5-7 as indicative of sin. To the contrary, R. Jose ha-Gelili maintains (*Mishnah, Sotah, ad loc.*) that it is precisely because these three categories of persons return home without any intimation of sin that they effectively serve as a face-saving device for the sinner, who can leave under these pretenses.

54. The grounds for this deferment are variously interpreted: The degree of personal tragedy that would be involved were a man to die in the course of fulfilling a milestone in his life (see Rashi, Deuteronomy 20:5, and D. Z. Hoffmann's position, *Commentary to Deuteronomy* 20:5, p. 398); his psychological incapacity for stamina on the battlefield, considering his emotional tie to a yet-unfulfilled enterprise (see Ibn Ezra, Ramban, *ad loc.*); the dictates of social wisdom, recommending that the primary initiatives of civilian life (consolidation of home, vineyard and marriage) be protected, in the interest of encouraging settlement of the land (see comment of Ish-Shalom to *Sifrei, Piska* 192 ["... that the cities of Israel not lie desolate."], n. 1, p. 110a; cf. Malbim, *Sifrei*, 101).

55. This is evident from the Targum's rendering of the following two verses (Deuteronomy 20:6, 7), where, similarly, a failure to have fulfilled a particular

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mitsvah—the redemption of the fruit of one's vine and the consummation in marriage of his betrothal—incurrs guilt.

56. Thus, even in its rendering of Deuteronomy 11:20-21, the Targum introduces no apotropaic theme.

57. *Tosafot, Bava Metsia* 101b; see also *Haggahot Shitah Mekubetset* (#24) to *Tosafot, Menahot* 41b. In *Tosafot, Shabbat* 22a, the apotropaic interpretation is cited alongside an opposing view, which supports the geonic understanding of the *baraita*.

58. See *She'iltot, Shelah*, 126; *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, ed. Auerbach, II, p. 78; *Ritva*, standard editions, *Bava Metsia* 102a. (With reference to *She'iltot*, see above, n. 23.) The apotropaic position of *Tosafot Bava Metsia*, on the other hand, which sees in the situation a very real danger, brooks no compromise, and insists that under no circumstances may the *mezuzot* be removed.

The *baraita*, in reinforcement of its stipulation that the *mezuzot* remain in place, recounts the ominous story of a man who violated the principle and suffered the loss of his family. The apotropaic view claims support for its position in this account. Since the vacating party was unconcerned for the welfare of the entering family, the members of his own family suffer accordingly (see *Ritva*, standard editions, *ad loc.*). No such interpretation, of course, could be given the story by R. Aha or R. Hai, since they see no endangerment of life in the circumstance of an absent *mezuzah*. As a literal punishment, such a calamity would certainly seem far out of proportion to the nature of the transgression as they define it. While they offer no alternate explanation of the account, they would probably take it as a figurative reflection on the nature of the violation; perhaps, the sudden loss of a viable family points, as a pedagogic parallel, to the abrupt termination of a functioning *mitsvah*, an indiscretion of which the vacating party was guilty. (See the comment of M. Mirkin, *Bereshit Rabbah*, Vol. 4 [Tel Aviv, 1972], p. 34 [85:3], where he explains a parallel *ma'amar* accordingly: "Anyone who begins a *mitsvah* but does not complete it will bury his wife and children.") Such supportive stories represent a particular genre of talmudic passage, designed to create exhortative impact. Like the *sugyah* in *Shabbat* 32b, this reference need not be taken literally as the prescription of a definitive punishment. (See passage cited in n. 50, above, where burial is invoked not as a threat of an actual punishment, but in order to depict in hyperbolic terms the worthlessness of an unspiritual existence.)

59. Rashi, *Menahot* 32b. See also *Piskei R. Isaiah b. Elijah Di Trani* (Jerusalem, 5731), p. 256.

Rashi invokes the apotropaic element in his explanation of another *sugyah*, as well, involving the principle of *hovat ha-dar*, which obliges the tenant—rather than the landlord—to affix a *mezuzah* to the dwelling (*Pesahim* 4a). The *rishonim*, generally, account for the tenant's obligation (be it *mide-rabbanan* or *mide-oraita*) in sober halakhic terms, on the basis of his functional residence on the premises, in contrast to the landlord, who is not actually present. Rashi, however, accompanies the functional explanation with the additional apotropaic consideration: "for it protects him." Not only do the preponderance of *rishonim* ignore Rashi's apotropaic interpretation of this *sugyah*, but even among the

limited number who introduce a "protective" element, the apotropaic principle is not necessarily implied. R. Jonathan ha-Kohen of Lunel (twelfth century Provencal), for example, defines the *hovat ha-dar* rule in terms of *shemirah*, but is quick to explain that his reference is to the statement of R. Hanina b. Hama, who sees the *mezuzah* as a symbol of God's protection (see *Shitah Mekubetset*, *Bava Metsia* 101b). *Rishonim* will at times speak of the party who is "protected by the *mezuzah*" not in a rigorous mechanistic sense, but merely as an identification of the individual with whom the *mezuzah* is halakhically associated.

60. *Tosafot*, *ad loc.* In *Megillah* 24b, where a "rounded" (elliptical) *tefillin shel rosh* is termed similarly by the Mishnah, "a danger and no *mitsvah*," Rashi offers the practical explanation, lest it penetrate the skull. R. Tam, on the other hand (*Tosafot*, *ad loc.*), describes the danger in terms of being unprotected by the *mitsvah*, since a rounded *bayit* is invalid. However, R. Tam's reference to the protection of the *mitsvah* is framed in providential rather than apotropaic terms—alluding to the merit of the *mekayyem ha-mitsvah* before God, not to any potency of the *mitsvah*-object. Thus, R. Tam draws the analogy to *Elisha Ba'al Kenafayyim* (*Shabbat* 49a), for whom a "miracle" (an act of God) was wrought when the *tefillin* he had removed from his head, as he was fleeing the Roman quaestor, was transformed into an innocent dove upon inspection.

61. The *Tosafot* in *Menahot* 32b, which cites R. Tam's view with its critique of Rashi's position, is part of a compilation of R. Samson of Sens, from whom all succeeding generations drew, and upon whose authority they relied. See E. Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* (Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 232, 512-514, and *Sefer Terumat ha-Deshen*, *Teshuvah* 19, to which he refers. Like *Tosafot*, Rosh (*Halakhot Ketanot*, 8) and *Mordecai* (*Halakhot Ketanot*, 961) conclude their citation of Rashi's view with R. Tam's critique.

62. See *Shem Tov* b. Abraham Ibn Gaon, *Migdal Oz*, *Hilkhot Mezuzah* 5:4. Rambam is able to come to terms with this post-talmudic addition to the *kelaf* only because it is confined to the outer side of the scroll (*ad loc.*).

63. See, for example, *Semag*, *Aseh* #23; Rosh, *Hilkhot Mezuzah*, 18; *Mordecai*, *Halakhot Ketanot*, 960. *Mordecai* also cites a reference to the *Shaddai* inscription in the geonic work, *Halakhot Gedolot*, which he discusses in a non-normative context (961).

64. The earliest record of this mnemonic interpretation appears in *Kol Bo* (Ch. 90), as well as in *Orhot Hayyim*, ed. M. Schlesinger (Berlin, 1902), II, p. 192, a Provencal work of R. Aaron ha-Kohen of Lunel (end of 13th—beginning of 14th century). *Kol Bo* too was probably his work, the first edition or first draft of *Orhot Hayyim*.

65. In fact, in both *Kol Bo* and *Orhot Hayyim*, Rambam's critique of those who interpret *mezuzah* as a self-protective device is cited. See n. 9, above.

The inscription on the outer side of the *kelaf* of the letters, *Kozu Bemokhsaz Kozu*, corresponding to the letters of *YHWH Elohenu YHWH*, which they follow in alphabetical succession and which they face back-to-back on the *kelaf*, is also a post-talmudic development. It is found in the 13th century German Hasidic component of the mystical *Sefer Razi'el* (Amsterdam, 1701), 8b, as well as in French and German halakhic works of the period. See *Mahzor Vitry*, ed.

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by S. Hurwitz (Jerusalem, 5723), p. 649; *Semag, ad loc.*; Rosh, *loc. cit.*; and *Mordecai*, 960. A French-German phenomenon, not practiced originally in Spain (see Rosh, 18, and R. Jeroham, *Toledot Adam ve-Havah* (Venice, 5313), Vol. 1, p. 179c), it was not known to Rambam. While for *Sefer Razi'el* this inscription, like the *shem Shaddai*, is of critical apotropaic importance, for the *rishonim* who cite it (see n. 63) it is only a custom of no documented rationale.

65a. The anti-satanic interpretation of *mitsvot* developed by the medieval Kabbalah will be treated in a separate study (see above, note 5).

66. See n. 24, above.

67. See formulation of Rambam, *Hilkhot Mezuzah* 6:13.

68. Chazal speak of the *zekhut* (merit) of the *mitsvah* performance, which yields protective benefits for the *mekayyem ha-mitsvah* (*Sotah* 21a). Merit is, of course, a qualitative term, reflecting the status of the individual before God. No mechanistic effect of the *mitsvah*-object or *mitsvah*-act is intended. In fact, the Talmud (*ad loc.*) questions the duration even of *zekhut ha-mitsvah*, once the experience of the *mitsvah* is over. Once a *mitsvah* has been executed, in this case the *mezuzah* having been affixed to the doorpost, and the individual is no longer consciously involved in the *mitsvah*, the protective merit of the act is no longer in effect, according to the plain sense of the *baraita* and the view of Ravina, the concluding amoraic position cited in the *sugyah*. Perpetual protective merit is earned only through a consistent, deep-seated identification with the root of the religious system—the study of Torah (such as an ongoing contemplation of the contents of the *mezuzah* inscription) or a devoted commitment to the *limmud Torah* of others. (See *Taz, Yoreh De'ah*, 285:1, who concedes that the claim of a perpetual *shemirah* deriving from the technical act of having posted a *mezuzah* ["even when a man is doing nothing but sleeping in his bed"] is inconsistent with the principle developed in the above *sugyah*.)

69. It is true that according to the more complex kabbalistic view of *mezuzah* (as distinct from the simpler pre-kabbalistic occult view), which sees the *mitsvah* as a microcosm of Divine *sefirot* from which it derives its power, an element of *kavvanah* is called for, which relates the earthly act of affixing the *mezuzah* to its Divine root above. Nonetheless, this *kavvanah* plays a primarily technical role, functioning to activate the impersonal *sefirah* forces inextricably linked with the *mezuzah*-object, rather than a pietistic role, which would transcend the *mitsvah* and bring the Jew into personal association with God Himself. See note 5, above.

70. Of course there is a dynamic activism involved in the world of the mystic. The *ba'al shem* (master of the name) is a powerful figure in his manipulation of supernatural forces. The kabbalists taught that man's execution of ritual acts can influence the forces of the Divine personality. Nonetheless, such a channeling of man's activist thrust toward purely spiritual initiatives tends to remove him from the concrete realities of the material world, with the resultant neglect of practical measures; hence the passivity to which we refer.

71. One is reminded of Rambam's attack on the fatalistic belief in astrology, a key element in ancient idolatry (*Letter on Astrology to the Sages of Provence*), where he attributes the destruction of the First Temple to the failure of the

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people to undertake the normal recourse of effective military training in anticipation of confronting their enemy. A belief in the occult tends to blunt normal, necessary human initiatives.

72. *Ketubbot* 41b. See *Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat*, 409:3, 427-8.

73. Efraim Urbach in *Emurot ve-De'ot Chazal* discusses the absence in talmudic thought of any mystical magical perception of *mitsvot* (pp. 322-324). The kabbalists, from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries on, introduced a radical transformation into the interpretation of *mitsvot*, investing religious acts and religious objects with enormous cosmic potency, the capacity to affect even the activity of the Divine personality (see note 5, above).

74. *Sifrei*, Deuteronomy 6:9.

75. *Baraita, Menahot* 43b.

76. See n. 9, above.

77. *The Nineteen Letters* (New York, 1950), ed. Jacob Breuer, based on translation of Bernard Drachman, Letter 18, p. 122. R. Hirsch's point here is cited by Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 30, and J. Katz, *Masoret u-Mashber*, p. 255, n. 16.

78. *Yoma* 11a; see our earlier discussion.

79. See n. 46, above, where the position of Ri is cited. The dweller remains, of course, under a perpetual obligation to affix the *mezuzah*, and, in this sense, is said to be "transgressing" (over) the *mitsvah* all the while he delays its fulfillment; but he has, nevertheless, committed no sin—the house is not forbidden (*eino asur*) to dwell in. It is in terms of this concept that the "transgression" of "two positive commands" for failing to post a *mezuzah* (*Menahot* 44a) is to be understood; not a substantive violation, but the omission of an obligation.

80. See earlier discussion, and n. 45.

81. See n. 58, above, and related discussion in body of paper.