



THE SHEMA IN THE MEZUZAH

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The Torah instructs the Jewish people twice to hang a mezuzah on their doorposts. The word mezuzah literally means “doorpost,” but it actually refers to the scroll – or klaf – enclosed in the ornamental case. On this handwritten parchment is the Shema, a central Hebrew prayer reminding us of God’s presence in our lives. A mezuzah on the door has come to symbolize Jewish identity and the sacredness of the home.

Jewish tradition teaches that to live in peace we all must learn to make compromises. Compromise is defined as agreement through communication, where agreement - not victory - is the goal. An oft-quoted verse from the Torah reads, “Justice, justice shall you pursue.” [Deut. 16:20]. Rashi, the 12th century scholar who inspired this story, explained the repetition: justice is said once for the law and once for compromise.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN READING

- Why did Annie’s grandmother want to hang her *mezuzah* before baking cookies?
- Can you find instances in the book where people are listening to one another and others where they are not listening?
- Annie refers to the “special paper” inside the *mezuzah*. What makes it so special?

In addition to the front entrance of the home, it is tradition to place a *mezuzah* on each doorway in the house (except the bathroom). Some people choose to put one on the garage! Traditional Jews “kiss” the *mezuzah* as they enter a home by touching the *mezuzah* and then kissing their fingers. Children might enjoy this custom when entering their rooms, if the *mezuzah* is hung at a level where it can be reached.

Visit a local synagogue or Jewish center, and find the *mezuzot* (plural). Note the variety of sizes and styles of ornamental *mezuzah* boxes. Perhaps you have doorways that could use a *mezuzah*. Look on the Internet or in Judaica shops for something that reflects your family’s taste. Making your own *mezuzah* can be a great family project. Purchase a kit, or repurpose unusual materials such as a test-tube, film canister, or hollowed-out twig.

Make hanging a *mezuzah* a special event! You can find the traditional ceremony and blessings on the Internet. You and your children may also choose to add personal prayers for your home and family.