

# Being a Jew Inside and Out

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## Two Complementary Mitzvos

Our doorway is our bridge to the outside world. It is the place of transition between our public, society-centered life and our private family-focused life. Throughout the year, we place one religious marker at this crucial exit and entrance point—our mezuzah. On Chanuka, though, at least according to the *תלמוד בבלי*, we are privileged to position another mitzvah object in our doorway, opposite the mezuzah. This is, of course, the menorah. Why exactly do we need two mitzvot to be performed at this place? To publicize the miracle of Chanuka, we could just as easily have positioned the menorah in our windows. Why does the Gemara demand specifically to place it in the doorway, opposite the mezuzah? What is the deeper message behind these two mitzvot?

Living in our open society, we encounter many situations, which challenge our religious observance. There are, at times, two opposite pressures, to which a Jew might succumb. On the one hand, there are those who find it easier to be a Jew on the “inside”. When they are at home, they are totally kosher, they daven, they make brachot, and they are meticulous about each detail of halacha. Yet when they go outside, they feel the need to blend in with society. Off comes any religious identification. The need to socialize and intermingle with professional acquaintances justifies the falling away of any religious norms. They are a Jew at home, but not amongst the nations.

On the other hand, there are those who find it easier to be a Jew on the “outside”. Peer pressure, being surrounded by others who would not approve of certain inappropriate behaviors, force them to behave religiously. They would not dare eat in a certain public eatery, or take certain liberties or shortcuts, related to their public religious observance. Yet, in the privacy of their own home, when nobody is watching, then the standards are forgotten.

These two behaviors, says Rabbi Benjamin Blech, are what *הקדוש ברוך הוא* had in mind when they enacted mezuzah on the right of the door and menorah on the left. The mezuzah is on our right upon entering our home. As we transition from our social public thoroughfare into our private domain, we take note of the mezuzah. [The right side is always the main side in halacha.] The mezuzah tells us that HaShem is always watching, and we always have a standard of behavior to live up to, even if no human being is present.

... and each time that we enter, we are met with the name of God, written on the klaf of the mezuzah, and we remember God's love for us, and we will be awakened from our spiritual slumber

**Rambam Hilchos Mezuza 6:13**

וכל זמן שיכנס ויצא יפגע ביהוד השם  
שמו של הקדוש ב"ה ויזכור אהבתו  
ויעור משנתו ושגיותו בהבלי הזמן  
רמב"ם הלכות מזוזה ו:יג

The mezuzah tells us not to leave our Judaism out on the street, not to live a Judaism based on others' judgments. "שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד" - ה' is always watching.

Yet upon exiting our house, the menorah is on our right. What is this meant to remind us? The Greek motto was the blending in of the nations, the Hellenization of the Jews. Be like us, why be different. The menorah symbolizes our victory over the Greeks and their creed. We must and will be Jews in the workplace, amongst our neighbors, just as we are in our own homes. So, as we leave our homes, and we look to the right, we see our menorah, to remind us not to leave our Judaism inside. The menorah says that we overcame the Greeks, and we must stay strong in our public Jewish way of life.

## Jewish Leaders Both On The Inside and Outside

Yosef HaTzadik himself, whom we always read about during the Chanuka weeks, epitomizes this message. On the one hand, in his epic struggle with the wife of Potiphar, he controls his urges, and privately was *mekadesh Shem Shamayim*. The Gemara<sup>42</sup> tells us that his father's image, symbolizing his religious upbringing, appeared to him in that private bedroom of the wife of Potiphar. Yosef knew the message of the mezuzah. He practiced his Judaism in private. Yet later on, we also observe Yosef the *public Jew*, Yosef the one who, though the only Jew in the entire country of Egypt, was not fearful to behave in a unique manner. The Torah tells us<sup>43</sup> that Yosef's master saw that God was with him. Rashi comments that *Shem Shamayim* was constantly on his lips. Yosef constantly invoked the name of God in his everyday conversations. He did not feel constrained by being out in the open, amongst strangers. Yosef understood the message of the menorah. He practiced his Judaism in public.

Rav Gedailah Schorr adds another idea, which helps deepen our understanding of what Yavan stood for. He quotes earlier sources which parallel the four Kingdoms with the four harsh sins, the three cardinal sins (idolatry, illicit relations, and murder) coupled with lashon harah. Yavan is paralleled with murder. On the surface, though, this is a perplexing equation. Yavan was all about culture and aesthetics. How does murder fit and parallel their world view? The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that murder, or literally spilling blood, means removing the blood which sustains the inner life of a person. What Yavan wanted to do was to remove the "blood" of every Jew, the soul of every Jew, חלק אלוהים ממעל. כי הדם הוא הנפש. They wanted to wipe out the soul of every Jew, forcing us to be exactly like them, and having us give up on our inner sentiments for Judaism, would, in effect, be killing us as Jews. That is why Yavan is best symbolized by the sin of murder, not

<sup>42</sup> Sotah 36b - נראתה לו דמות דיוקנו של אביו

<sup>43</sup> Bereishit 39:3

because of their interest in physical murder, but because of its insistence on the murder of the spiritual blood flow, inside each and every Jew.

The Chashmonaim, with HaShem's divine help, were able to thwart the plans of the Yevanim. Our job on Chanuka is to remember what this victory symbolizes. Our inner and deep feelings for our religion must motivate us to be תוכו כבירו, to be Jews on the inside, in private, as well as Jews on the outside, amongst other people. Let us use this holiday as a springboard to strengthen our spiritual growth, both in our homes and in our public lives.