

Sanctuary Mezuzah Project

sanctuary / santuario / mizbeyekh / almaladh alaman / kedusha / space filled with holiness

When we affix a mezuzah to our door, it is a reminder that one is on the verge of sanctified space. Every time we walk through the door, we recenter ourselves in who we are and what we believe. And when others walk by, the mezuzah tells them that this is a Jewish home with Jewish values.

Through the hanging up of a mezuzah, we are empowered to sanctify the spaces that we inhabit. However, there is a joke embedded in the mezuzah: by its placement at the threshold, rather than, say, on a wall deep inside a room, it refuses to tell us in which direction lies that holy space. And so our house with its mezuzah is a sanctuary, and likewise the space outside our door frame. Who might be standing at the threshold, in the holy space outside our front door? Is it a neighbor facing deportation? A person who is hungry or underhoused? A person fleeing a violent home or workplace? Our own tired, troubled soul? Or that of the beloveds who live with us?

The text rolled up inside is centered around love. Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that "Justice is really love in calculation. Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love."

JVP's Jewish values are about working towards a safe, free, and just world— for us and everyone. And that means standing up against Israeli occupation and apartheid, and for the right of Palestinians to live in freedom and dignity. It also means standing up against ICE deportations, and policies that tear immigrant and refugee families apart. It teaches that when we say "Never again," we mean "to anyone." It teaches that it's on us to stand up for what's right, and that the time to stand up is now.

It is no coincidence that we launched this mezuzah project before Passover. In the Exodus story, Moses and God had been championing the fight to free the Israelites from Pharaoh - but it was not working. The night before the 10th plague, the Israelites were agitated to "go public" - marking their doors with lambs' blood so that the *The Angel of Death / Malakh Ha-Mavet* would know to 'pass over'. They marked their doors and marked themselves, joining in their own struggle for liberation. They stopped waiting, stopped trying to pass, and they took a risk towards freedom- together. As we approach Passover, we are marking our doors and we are marking Passover traditions of welcoming strangers to our tables.

**"And a stranger you shall not oppress;
for you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Mitzrayim."
-Exodus 23:9**

May this mezuzah remind us to act justly with all of the love in our hearts, with the strength of our souls, with whatever resources we can muster. May we breathe in kedusha, holiness, sanctity AND breathe it back out into the world, towards displaced peoples seeking protection in the face of modern day Pharaohs.

**"The destiny of our planet, our towns, and our lives is caught up in each others' fates."
- Marisa Franco, Mijente**

This mezuzah, declares that everyone— Palestinians, immigrants including DREAMers, Syrian and African refugees— everyone— deserves a safe home. JVP will be making an organizational gift to Mijente, a national hub for Latinx and Chicanx organizing, in honor of our March Membership Drive and the fight for immigrant rights. We encourage others to support their organizing as well. Go to jvp.org/mezuzah for ways to support, collaborate, or match your donation.

The Ritual & Intention of Your Mezuzah

Technically the mezuzah is not the beautiful case but the scroll (*klaf*) that it contains. A traditional mezuzah contains the first two paragraphs of the shema, a passage from Torah (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21). The most traditional custom is to roll up a hand-inscribed parchment called a klaf, and place it in the case. This is a kosher mezuzah. You could look at these passages as affirming oneness, love, and that our personal spiritual orientation and the fate of the earth are interconnected. We include alternative options to enclose in your Mezuzah case, and of course- you are welcome to play and experiment with what feels powerful to you to help bring sanctuary to your home. You might especially like the beautiful rendition of these texts by poet Aurora Levins Morales. You can find more of her art and poetry at <http://www.auroralevinsmorales.com/>

It is customary to place a mezuzah on the doorposts of a “permanent dwelling,” which is to say, a place where you plan to stay at least thirty days. Traditionally one places a mezuzah on every door frame in a house, except for the bathroom door, though many people place a mezuzah only on their front door. There are varying traditions about where on the doorpost to place the mezuzah, and facing in what direction. A common and acceptable rule is to place it in the upper third of the doorway, with the upper end tilted in towards the house. If your doorframe is too narrow, you can place it vertically. You want it placed where you can touch it as you walk through the door. Some people observe the custom of touching, and even kissing, the mezuzah every time you pass through a doorway on which one is affixed.

Mezuzah Klaf Translation:

Hear, O Israel, HaShem is our God, HaShem is one. You shall love HaShem, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources. And these things that I command you today shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you go on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your arm and they shall be an ornament between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the **doorposts** of your house and on your gates.*

And it will be that if you listen to my commandments that I command you today, to love HaShem, your God, and to serve God with all your hearts and all your souls. And I will place rain for your land in its proper time, the early and the late rains, that you may gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil. And I will provide grass in your field for your cattle, and you will eat and you will be satisfied. Watch yourselves, lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve other gods, and prostrate yourselves to them. And the wrath of God will be upon you, and God will restrain the heaven and there will be no rain, and the ground will not yield its produce, and you will be lost quickly from upon the good land that God gives you.

*And you shall place these words of mine on your hearts and on your souls, and you shall bind them as a sign upon your arms and they shall be ornaments between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your children to discuss them, when you sit in your house and when you go on the way, and when you lie down and when rise up. And you shall write them upon the **doorposts** of your house and upon your gates, in order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the good land that God swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of Heaven over earth.*

** HaShem means “the name”*

Blessing your home

There is a lovely custom of having a chanukat ha-bayit, a house dedication, when you move into a new home and affix mezuzot. You can invite friends to help you pound the nails and to offer wishes, intentions, and blessings for your life in this home. What is being called into it? What is being kept out? That said, it is perfectly acceptable to affix a mezuzah by yourself. Check out jvp.org/mezuzah or Ritual Well -ritualwell.org/ritual/blessings-new-home for more ritual ideas.

The blessing one can say right before putting up a mezuzah is:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוֵּינוּ לְקַבֵּעַ מְזוּזָה

Baruch atah, HaShem Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu likboah m'zuzah

Praise to You, HaShem our God, sovereign of the universe, who in a holy way honors us with mitzvot, commanding us to affix the mezuzah.

A sweet song to sing from a verse from the *Hashkiveinu* prayer:

Ufros aleynu sukkat shlomecha

Spread your canopy of peace over us

ופרש עלינו סכת שלומך