

## Ask the Rabbi

**Question:** Why is the *mezuzah* mounted at an angle on the door frame?

**Answer:** Traditions regarding *mezuzot* are surprisingly consistent throughout the Jewish world, perhaps resulting from the ancient origins of this practice. The *mezuzah* is the scroll, crafted on the same material and in the same manner as a Torah scroll, upon which is written the passage from the book of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the *Shema* and *V'ahavta*. (The decorative case that protects the parchment scroll is usually referred to as a *bayit* or house.) This passage instructs us to inscribe these words upon the doorposts of our houses and upon our gates. And so we affix the scroll to our doorframes.

When we affix the *mezuzah* to our door, we choose a height approximately eye level, about one third of the way down the doorframe on the right hand side upon entering the house. Since most people are right handed, this enables us to easily reach out and touch the *mezuzah* and symbolically bring the words it contains to our lips, where they can be received with a kiss. This serves as a reminder that our Jewish teachings and Jewish identities should be considered in all of our goings and our comings, and that we should always speak with an awareness of the guidance of our tradition.

The practice of mounting the *mezuzah* at an angle with the top tipped into the home began in the middle ages. Two great rabbis disagreed as to how to mount the *mezuzah* on the doorpost: one said vertically, while the other, horizontally. The resolution was to compromise and show our respect for both rabbis and their opinions by mounting the *mezuzah* at an angle. This is a very important Jewish value, respect for diverse opinions. In fact, our Talmud, a collection of the earliest teachings of our rabbis and sages preserves the arguments and divergent opinions usually without reference to the resolution of the disagreement, teaching us that the discussion and the questioning is often more valuable than the answer. The angle of the *mezuzah* serves as a constant reminder to be respectful of the diversity of opinion with which we are daily confronted.