

# THE SILENT WITNESS

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Rabbi Frand On Parshas Eikev

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Good Shabbos!

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### The Silent Witness

*And you shall write them on the doorposts of your homes and your gates. (Devarim 11:20)*

The Mezuzah stands like a sentinel at the door, we pass it whenever we enter or leave the room. What are we to think as we look upon the mezuzah? What are we to contemplate when we see the letter shin on the case and are reminded of the holy scrolls within?

The Rambam, at the end of his presentation of the laws of mezuzah, tells us to think about the eternal nature of the Almighty. This will inspire us to awaken from our slumber and come to the realization that nothing in this world is permanent other than the Almighty, His Torah.

Why does the mezuzah remind us of these concepts?

Perhaps it is because the mezuzah is a silent witness to the ebb and flow of history and human events. Think about the mezuzah of an old shul or some other venerable edifice. It has been hanging there for decades if not centuries. It has seen infants brought into the shul to be circumcised, and it has seen these same people grown old brought into the shul to be eulogized and buried. It has seen generations come and go. It has seen empires rise and fall. It has seen the birth of ideologies and their demise.

In the last century alone, our hypothetical mezuzah would have seen humanism, capitalism, materialism, existentialism, each embraced as life philosophies and then discredited. It would have seen the rise of the Soviet Union and Communism and their ignominious collapse. It would have seen the creation of the Third Reich, the Thousand-Year Reich, its perpetration of the Holocaust against the Jewish people and its ultimate defeat and destruction. It would have seen the birth of Israel and its growth to maturity.

When the railroads were introduced in the 19th century, people thought the new technology was so perfect that it would never change. The railroad companies sold corporate bonds for centuries in advance. And where are they all today? On the scrap heap, along with their rusting trains.

Human beings are always seeking immortality. This invention, this idea, this building, this book, this one will capture that elusive immortality, this one will stand the test of time, this is one for the ages, this one will make me immortal. But it doesn't work.

The Torah tells us (Bamidbar 32:42), "And Novach went and captured Kenas and its suburbs, and he named it (lah) Novach in his name." According to the rules of Hebrew grammar, the word lah should end with a mappik heh, a mark of emphasis, but it doesn't. It ends with a weak heh. The Midrash tells us that the weak heh lets us know that the city did not last. It was eventually destroyed.

Why does the Torah consider it important to let us know this information? It is meant to teach us the futility of immortalization. Novach wanted to immortalize himself by creating something permanent - an entire city, no less! - and crowning it with his own name. But he failed. The city was destroyed, and his name would be forgotten if it were not mentioned in the Torah.

Everything constantly changes. Nothing is permanent. Only the Almighty and His Torah are permanent. The mezuzah can bear witness.

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