

BUYING A MEZUZAH Lecture Tour to Highlight Pitfalls



Rabbi Greenfield

addition VMS has printed a number of publications, periodicals and pamphlets aimed at opening the eyes of an unwary public to the various angles and complexities of the problem. This education applies to *tefillin* and *sifrei Torah* as well as *mezuzos* — indeed the VMS is also combating by ingenious means the growing menace of *sifrei Torah* thefts — but this article will concentrate on *mezuzos* alone.

There are no less than 46-49 *dinim* governing the writing of *mezuzos* by ordained *sifrim*. Each *mezuzah* has 713 letters arranged over 22 lines and each letter must conform to various requirements; if just one letter is missing or shaped incorrectly it renders the whole *mezuzah posul*. It takes about two-and-a-half to three hours to write a kosher *mezuzah* and the chances of human error — even with the most expert of *sifrim* — are always present. It therefore follows, says the VMS, that utmost care be taken when buying *mezuzos* which should be immediately checked by a reliable *baal me'illah*.

The VMS further urges that *mezuzos* be taken down and checked every three-and-a-half years as *halacha* requires. The ravages of time and the elements cause *mezuzos* to deteriorate making this periodic examination realistic and necessary.

The VMS claims that a staggering 80 per cent or so of *mezuzos* they check in communities worldwide are in fact *posul*. Many *mezuzos* were never kosher in the first place whilst others have suffered through lack of regular examination. These *Mezuzathons* — clinics wherein a community's members can bring their *mezuzos* for

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A LONDON gentleman several weeks ago bought himself a new *mezuzah*, paying what most would consider a reasonable price for it. He then took his purchase to a Rov who, after examining it, promptly pronounced it *posul*. Understandably upset, he resolved to do something positive about this sort of setback, feeling that what had happened was tantamount to buying a piece of *treifah* meat believing it to be kosher.

Gathering a few friends around him, he formed a committee to combat further sales of similar misleading *mezuzos* and to make the community generally more aware of the existence of this problem. It soon became clear to these founder members — Rabbi Hirsch, Mr M Bookey, Mr S Morgenstern and Mr Y A Ostroff — that the size and scope of the difficulties that faced them were really beyond their capabilities. So they decided to join forces with America's Vaad Mishmeres Stam.

The VMS (the word STaM is an acronym for Sifrei Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzos) was established ten years ago by Rabbi David L Greenfield and Rabbi Shmuel Granatstein both of whom were then working in Boro Park, New York as *sifrim* and examiners. Shocked at the alarming increase of defective *mezuzos* brought to them continually by unsuspecting customers, they decided to counter the problem themselves by setting up an entirely non-profit making organisation to act as the consumer's ombudsman and to do battle against the increasing fraud. It must be stressed very strongly that the VMS — from its outset — has

Question 1 What would you do if there was a fire in town?
a) let it extinguish by itself!
b) watch it burning!
c) call the Fire Brigade!

1. c) but. ת"ו there isn't a fire.

Question 2 What would you do if there was a "Gneivah" in town?
a) turn a blind-eye!
b) ask for a share of the profits!
c) call the police!

2. c) but. ת"ו there isn't a "Gneivah"

Question 3 What do you do if 80%* of MEZUZOS in town are suspect of being posul?
a) pray for the problem to resolve itself!
b) don't look too carefully — and say they're "Kosher"
c) call The Vaad Mishmeres STAM.

* Based on statistics issued by the Vaad Mishmeres STAM.
3. c) but.

YES!
80% * MEZUZOS ARE
SUSPECT OF BEING
POSUL!

"Shrei Gevalt"
"What do we do?"
"Call The Vaad Mishmeres
STAM"***
THEY'RE COMING!

Read next week's Jewish Tribune for details

* Based on statistics issued by the V.M.S.
** The centre for international activities to preserve and promote the halachic integrity of Scribal arts, Torah scrolls, Tefillin and Mezuzos.

checking by a team of 1.5-20 *sofrim* at an appointed time — form one of VMS's foremost activities. The organisation adds that it is the small *mezuzos* which are mainly found to be *posul*; consequently these are now highly suspect and best avoided. The Israeli newspapers *Maariv* and *Haetzofeh* have both reported that the Rabbanut has in fact withdrawn its *hechsherim* from small *mezuzos*.

time is saved. For example a *mezuzah* can be read electronically in just three seconds. *tefillin* take one minute and a *sefer Torah* approximately four hours — this is one tenth of the time normally required. A major obstacle to progress is the great shortage of skilled *sofrim* worldwide. Although VMS is training more — both full-time and part-time — the demand remains as yet undruggable. In recent years it was noted that although Jerusalem has over 1000 *sofrim* and Bnei Brak over 500, the burgeoning community of Boro Park had less than ten whilst Los Angeles, with a Jewish population of some 600,000, had just one.

A committee, which has the support and backing of the Rabbonim of Golders Green, particularly Rabbi E Halpern, has now invited two VMS representatives to come to this country to highlight the *mezuzah* problem. Again it must be stated emphatically that VMS is not setting up a branch to sell *mezuzos* nor is it "knocking" the local *sofrim* here. As in other countries, its sole aim is to increase general awareness of the situation and counter the mass producers of *posul* goods. The VMS representative, co-founder Rabbi Greenfield, and Rabbi Yaakov Basch, a member of the Executive, are scheduled to address audiences in both stults and schools to get the message across.

Elisha Horowitz

The Vaad Mishmeres Stam are here

ARE YOU SURE YOUR MEZUZOS ARE KOSHER?

A unique opportunity to find out

TAKE THEM DOWN-BRING THEM IN HAVE THEM CHECKED WHILE YOU WATCH!

A free checking session organised by the V.M.S.

Sunday 17th March '85 **שבת 17 במרץ 1985** **10am-1pm**
Beth Shmuel Synagogue 171 Golders Green Road, NW11



לפי
התקנות
של

*The centre for international activities to preserve and promote the halachic integrity of scribal arts:
Torah Scrolls, Tefillin, And Mezuzos*



Rabbi Elchonon Halpern (centre) who has accepted the presidency of the British Vaad Mishmeres Stam at a meeting with the organisers. Right, Saviour Rebbe, left Rabbi

Yaakov Basch and Rabbi David Greenfield of New York.

Mezuzah bombshell

SOME FIFTY per cent of the 1500 *mezuzos* brought for free checking at a special session in North West London's Beis Shmuel Beis Hamidrash on Sunday were found to be *posul*, said a member of the London branch of Vaad Mishmeres Stam. He added however that precise statistics were not yet available.

The spokesman apologised for any inconvenience caused by the fact that many *mezuzos* could not be checked and returned immediately. This was due to the very heavy demand which the committee had quite clearly not foreseen. People were waiting to get in before the advertised opening time and others had to be turned away at the end.

Four London *sofrim* worked continuously to cope with the flood of *mezuzos* under the expert guidance of Rabbi D Greenfield, co-founder of the VMS in America who is a renowned *posek* in *sifrei Torah*, *tefillin* and *mezuzos*. Even the slightest *shadlos* were referred to Rabbi

Greenfield and minor repairs were dealt with immediately. However the backlog became so great that two extra *sofrim* from Strassbourg were sent for and the work continued until Tuesday.

Some *mezuzah* cases were found to contain paper prints whilst amongst the *mezuzos* common faults were faded or crinkled lettering and many worthless scribbles. It was estimated that ten to fifteen per cent of the *mezuzos* examined had *never* been kosher.

Audio-visual presentations highlighting *mezuzah* pitfalls, both in Yiddish and English, were run concurrently with the examination. Amongst Godolin featured were the late Salmater Rebbe z"l and yibodeil chain the Debreziner Rov, Rabbi M Bick and Rabbi S Wosner.

Similar VMS presentations were subsequently shown in North London at the Beis Hamidrash Torah Eiz Chaim (69 Lordship Road) and the Yesodey Hatorah School. Rabbi

Greenfield stressed that the creation of an educated public aware of these *mezuzah* dangers would ease the situation. He also appealed for more people to learn *sofrus*.

Further displays were given at the Hasmonean Grammar School, Pardes House School, Menorah Grammar School and the London Jewish Academy (Dvar Yerushalayim).

Rabbi E Halpern accepted the position of president of the local VMS on Wednesday, in the presence of other North West London Rabbonim. He appealed for people to be patient as there is now a shortage of replacement *mezuzos* for those found to be *posul*. Fresh stocks under the *hazugcho* of Rabbi S Wosner of Bnei Brak will be arriving in due course.

Administration for the London VMS venture was expressed in many quarters and some sizeable donations have been received. Plans to establish a permanent office are being formulated.