



What is a Mezuzah?

Mezuzah means “doorpost” in Hebrew. The mezuzah consists of a case that contains a rolled up scroll.

The case can be made of a variety of materials-clay, stone, metal, glass, wood or even plastic.

Hanging *mezuzot* (plural) on your doorposts fulfills one of the 613 *mitzvot*, or sacred obligations, prescribed in the Torah and continues a tradition handed down from generation to generation for thousands of years.



The Letter Shin

Shin is the twenty first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It adorns the front of the mezuzah case. *Shin* also stands for *Shaddai*, one of the names of Gd.

Shaddai is often interpreted to mean “almighty” but can also be translated as “my breast”.

Shin is also the first letter of the word *shema*, which means “listen”. The *Shema* is the central prayer of Judaism, written on the scroll contained by the mezuzah case.

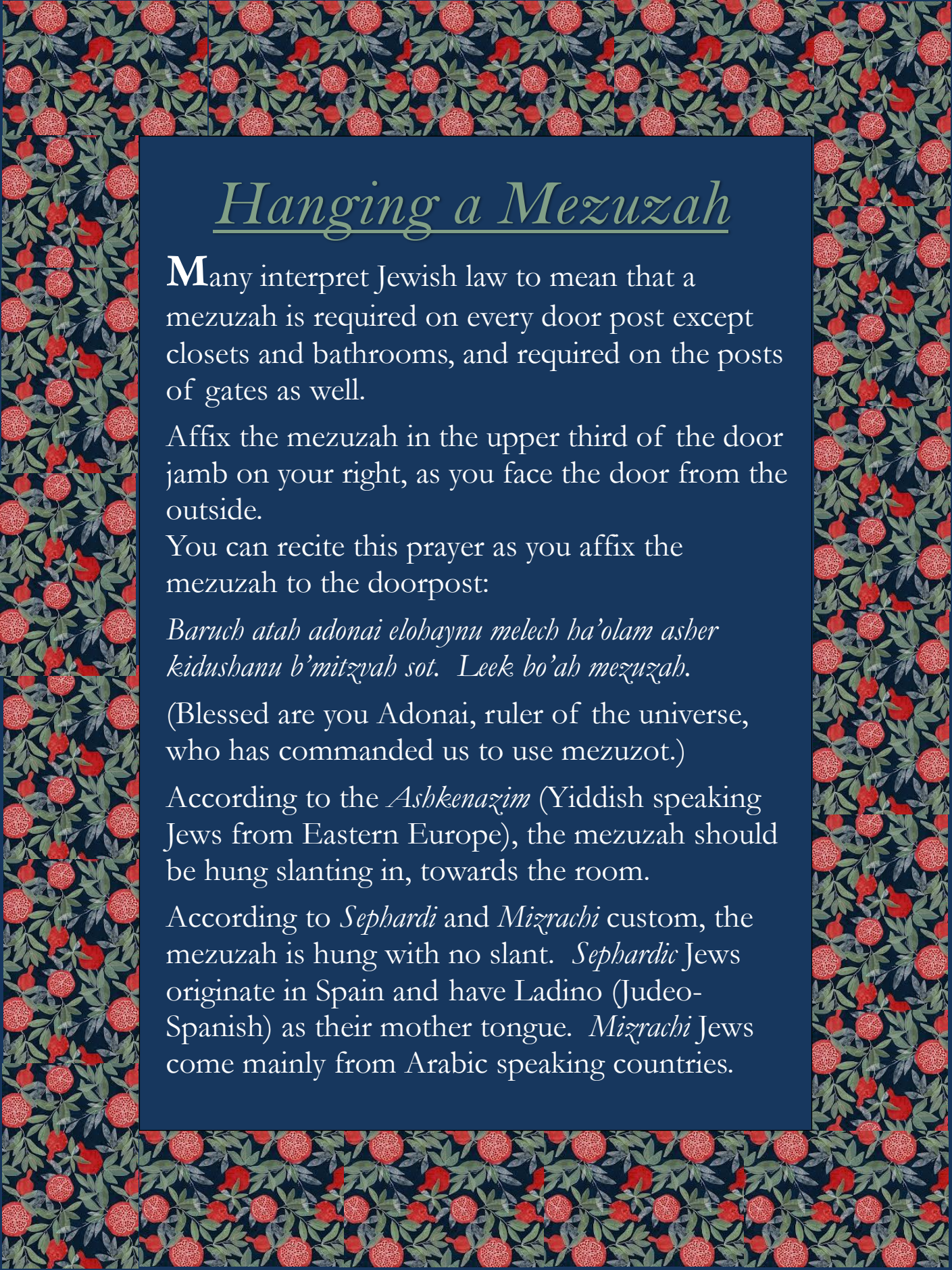


The Scroll

The important part of the mezuzah is the part you don't see: the rolled up *klaf*, or scroll, contained by the case. For the *klaf* to be kosher (valid according to Jewish law), it must be written on special parchment by a *sofer*, a highly trained and learned scribe.

On the *klaf* are written two verses from Deuteronomy, including the *Shema*, a prayer which says "Listen, Gd is one".

Many people find a photocopy of the kosher scroll acceptable. And others even write their own, giving the mezuzah a very personal meaning.



Hanging a Mezuzah

Many interpret Jewish law to mean that a mezuzah is required on every door post except closets and bathrooms, and required on the posts of gates as well.

Affix the mezuzah in the upper third of the door jamb on your right, as you face the door from the outside.

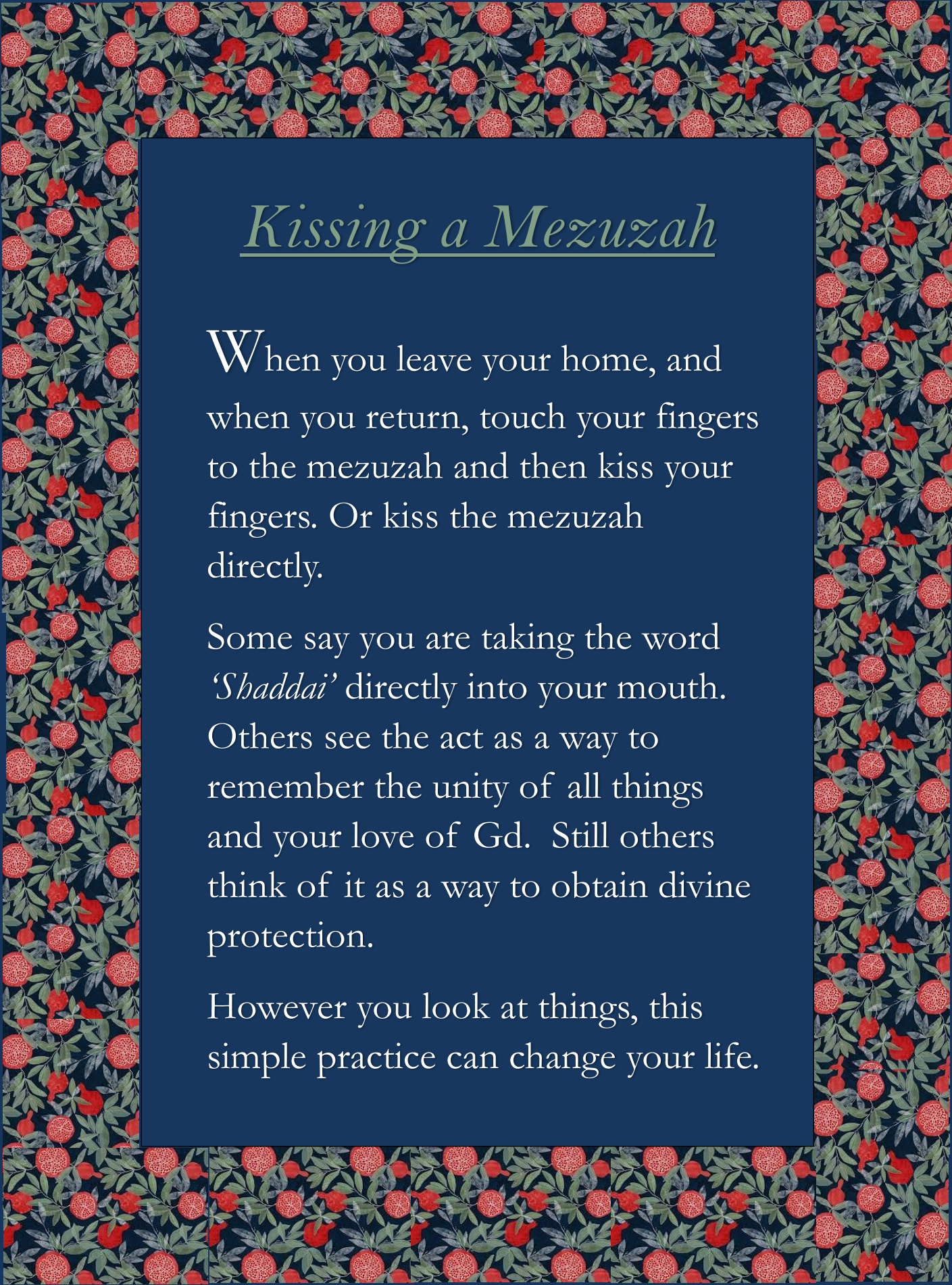
You can recite this prayer as you affix the mezuzah to the doorpost:

Baruch atah adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam asher kidushanu b'mitzvah sot. Leek bo'ah mezuzah.

(Blessed are you Adonai, ruler of the universe, who has commanded us to use mezuzot.)

According to the *Ashkenazim* (Yiddish speaking Jews from Eastern Europe), the mezuzah should be hung slanting in, towards the room.

According to *Sephardi* and *Mizrachi* custom, the mezuzah is hung with no slant. *Sephardic* Jews originate in Spain and have Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) as their mother tongue. *Mizrachi* Jews come mainly from Arabic speaking countries.

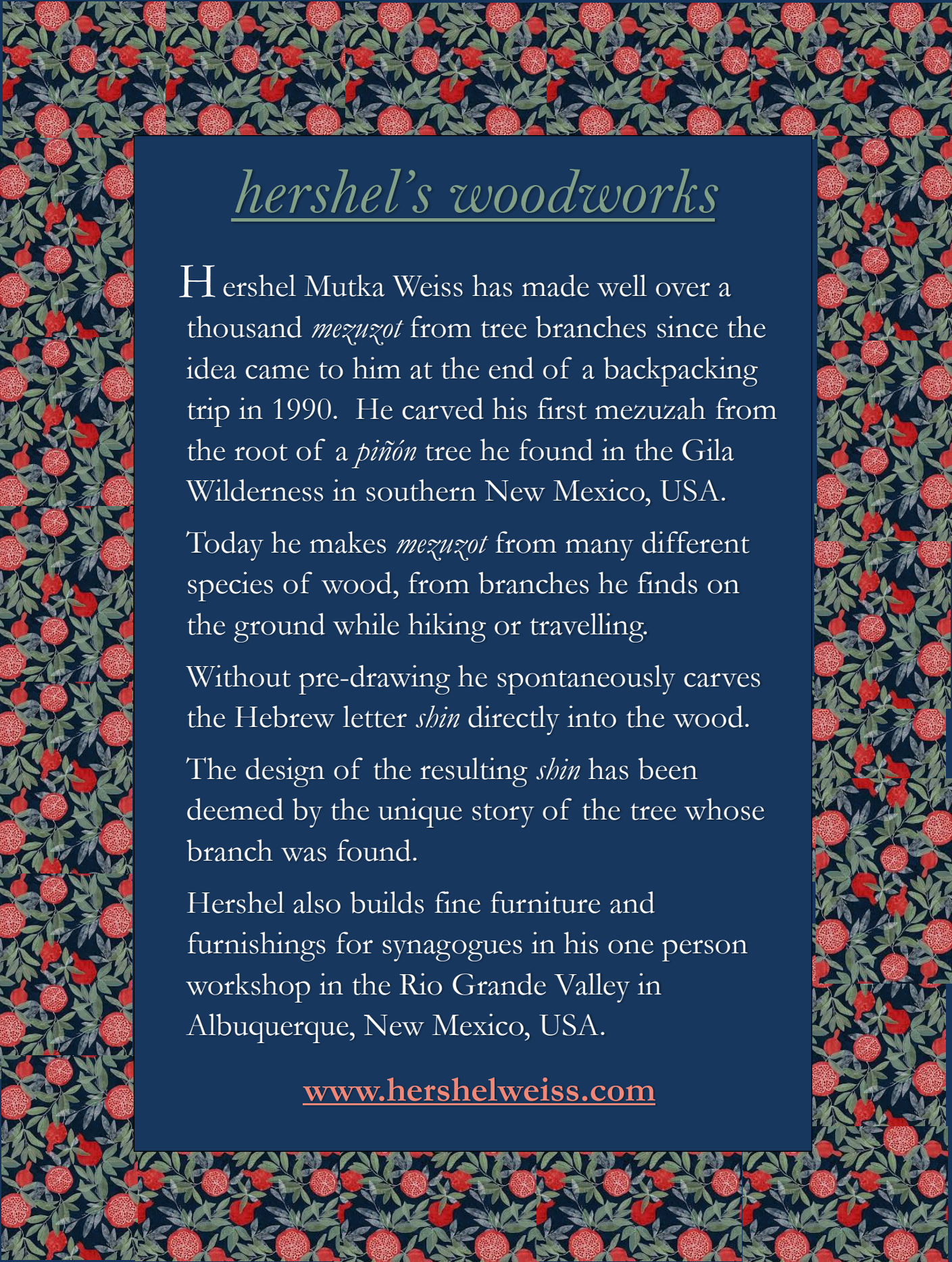


Kissing a Mezuzah

When you leave your home, and when you return, touch your fingers to the mezuzah and then kiss your fingers. Or kiss the mezuzah directly.

Some say you are taking the word '*Shaddai*' directly into your mouth. Others see the act as a way to remember the unity of all things and your love of Gd. Still others think of it as a way to obtain divine protection.

However you look at things, this simple practice can change your life.



hershel's woodworks

Hershel Mutka Weiss has made well over a thousand *mezuzot* from tree branches since the idea came to him at the end of a backpacking trip in 1990. He carved his first mezuzah from the root of a *piñón* tree he found in the Gila Wilderness in southern New Mexico, USA.

Today he makes *mezuzot* from many different species of wood, from branches he finds on the ground while hiking or travelling.

Without pre-drawing he spontaneously carves the Hebrew letter *shin* directly into the wood.

The design of the resulting *shin* has been deemed by the unique story of the tree whose branch was found.

Hershel also builds fine furniture and furnishings for synagogues in his one person workshop in the Rio Grande Valley in Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA.

www.hershelweiss.com