



INSTITUTE
FOR
JEWISH
CONTINUITY

Ki Tavo - Tall Fences Make Good People

Rabbi Shmuel Silber
www.rabbisilber.com

(This week's essay is based on a verse found in last week's Parsha. I chose to expound on this theme as I found it pertinent and relevant as we near the High Holidays).

דברים פרק כב פסוק ח

כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעקה לגגך ולא תשים דמים בביתך כי יפל הנפל ממנו:

When you build a new house, you shall make a guard rail (fence) for your roof, so that you shall not cause blood [to be spilled] in your house, if the one who falls should fall from it [the roof](Devorim 22:8).

The Torah commands us to safeguard our property by installing a fence along the perimeter of the roof. What is the reason for this mitzvah? The simple answer is found in the verse itself, "V'LO TASIM DAMIM B'BEYSECHA" – in order to prevent bloodshed. The Sforno (Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno, 1475-1550) explains that the Torah is sensitizing us to the safety and well-being of those around us. Not only must I be vigilant to not harm another, I must also make sure that my property does not pose a risk to anyone who may enter.

The great Chassidic master, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev (1740-1810) explains that the purpose of the *MAAKEH* (fence) is to "build upon" the blessing of the home. A home is more than just a physical domicile; it represents and embodies the physical and material blessings we receive from God. Our material blessings are not an ends, they are a means for further accomplishment and growth. The blessings (home) we receive create the foundation upon which we can build a beautiful edifice of life accomplishment. The "home" is to be used as a stepping stone to advance higher and become more. This symbolism is expressed in the building of the *MAAKEH* which extends "above" the home. Furthermore, when we experience *simcha* (happiness) as a result of our life blessings it is important that we transform that emotion into action. Emotions are fleeting and temporal. In the moment that I feel elated about something beautiful that God has done for me – I must plug that emotion into dynamic life activity. In this way, even when the emotion dissipates, the actions remain. When God gives you a home of beautiful life happiness, build the fence – build on the *simcha* and create something that will endure.

Perhaps, we can suggest an additional approach. Building a home is accomplished piece by piece, brick by brick and only after incredible exertion and effort is the structure complete. Any attempted short-cuts can create critical errors that can compromise the stability of the home. The same is true when building an identity. We build ourselves brick by brick – accomplishment after accomplishment, step by step with the recognition that if we engage in a process of sustained building we will create a beautiful identity and spiritual persona. We must use the physical construction of our worldly homes as a paradigm and blue-print for how to build a successful and meaningful life. I must strive to become a home.

Perhaps, in this light we can understand the verse cited above in a different fashion:

- **"KI TIVNEH BAYIS CHADASH, When you will build a new home"** – when I engage in the process of building a "new me" – of starting again, of trying to begin a new chapter in my life.

Part of completing the structure is the building of a roof (*GAG*). While the roof is incredibly necessary and important – it also signifies the end of the house – it is the boundary – it limits the dimensions of the home.

- **"V'ASITA MAAKEH L'GAGECHA, You shall make a fence for your roof"** – don't limit yourself with the roof – build more – extend the home/self. Even if the roof has been built - build higher – create the *MAAKEH*. The *MAAKEH* represents my ability to continue to build and grow despite certain limitations.

This simple verse provides us with important lessons for the New Year. We all experience moments of inspiration.

Unfortunately, we often let those moment slip through our fingers. The inspiration dissipates and we are left with nothing to show. In those moments of inspiration, in the moments of *simcha* – commit yourself to doing more. If God showers blessing upon you and your heart is filled with joy – decide how you will immortalize that joy by encasing it in some dynamic activity. Don't let inspired happiness come and go – grab it and do something with it. If you are privileged to receive the gift of a "home" from God, don't just thank Him, build your "fence."

The Yomim Noraim (High Holidays) offer us an opportunity to begin building a new home. The problem that often occurs with life-construction is that we build our ceilings too low. God encourages us to build beyond the roof, to extend ourselves upward. We miss out on so many beautiful life opportunities because we think they are beyond us. As we begin to expand and rebuild our life homes let us find the strength within to build a little higher.