

Containing Conceit Deut., Ch. 22

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

Rashi

When you build a new house

If you have fulfilled the commandment of “sending away [the mother bird from her] nest,” you will eventually build a new house and fulfill the commandment of guard-rail, because [the fulfillment of] one commandment pulls along with it [an opportunity to fulfill] another commandment [i.e., one commandment leads to another]. You will then come to [possess] a vineyard, a field, and fine clothes. Therefore, these passages are juxtaposed [that is, those just discussed, and the ensuing passages pertaining to vineyards, fields, and garments]. — [Tanchuma 1]

A guard rail

Rashi

A fence surrounding the roof. Onkelos renders: like a sheath, which protects what is inside it.

Rambam, Laws of Killing 11: 1-5

The Torah requires a Jew to erect a fence or other form of barrier around his roof. This commandment applies also to any dangerous situation, such as a swimming pool or a tall stairways.

If a fallen one falls from it

Rashi

The term fallen one implies that the person who died deserved to fall (for, presumably, G-d punished him in this way for his prior sins), but G-d causes good things to happen through good people and bad things through bad people.

Sforno

Therefore the builder or owner of the hazard is at least morally liable.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

The obligation to build a fence around the roof applies to all houses, not just newly built ones and devolves on the individual whenever a house comes into his possession, not only if he builds it. The Torah uses this wording to allow for these allegorical interpretations:

When you build a new house--When a person begins a new life (as in marriage) and takes upon himself the responsibility of earning a livelihood, a person’s spiritual status may easily plummet. At such a time he must set upon himself guardrails, new parameters and principles to keep himself in check.

Any time an individual is immersed in “a new home” or a new lifestyle, with a greater degree of immersion in physicality, he must build a guardrail. His previous manner of spiritual service will not suffice and he must take upon himself additional guardrails so as not to take a spiritual stumble in thought, speech or deed. This refers to any time a person is involved with elevating his portion of physical reality. The house is considered “new” because spiritualizing the physical is a reversal of the order of creation. G-d made the physical world appear consummately physical, we reveal its inner Divine essence and make it a vehicle for the spiritual.

Make a fence--in order to succeed in this mission and avoid being dragged into the materiality of the



פרק כב

ח. כי תבנה בית ה'דש
ועשית מעקה לגגך ולא
תשים דמים בביתך כי יפל הנפל ממנו :

physical world, we must be sure to remain sufficiently aloof from the world. This we accomplish by setting appropriate boundaries, red lines that we do not cross. This shows that our involvement in the physical world is not for our own betterment or indulgence, but for selfless purposes. In turn this selflessness opens us up to higher levels of Divine consciousness.

Proverbs 16:5

Those who are haughty are an abomination to G-d.

R' Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb

Man has no greater enemy than success. As long as you continue to wish and to hope and to fear, you will feel that you were created by G-d, that you are His servant and that you are a link in the chain of mankind. But when you become a proud owner or possessions, suddenly all your feelings for your fellow man shrivel up. Instead of fearing G-d and loving mankind, you idolize yourself, seek your own interests and put the gifts that you now have to selfish use.

Maamar Reishis Goyim Amalek

Egoism and self-importance are at the root of every spiritual downfall for all evil traits stem from them.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

A roof being the highest part of any structure alludes to the ego, which gives a person an elevated impression of himself. Thus, in order to prevent a person from "falling off his roof" by allowing his feelings of swollen self-esteem to degenerate into selfishness, we are warned to "make a fence for your roof", to carefully control and temper the ego with guardrails.

These guard rails placed around a person's conceit is important not only to protect oneself from this ugly trait, but to ensure that one's ego and self-importance will not bring about the spiritual downfall of one's fellow Jew.

When you build a new house, implies that the individual ought not be satisfied merely with serving G-d himself but he should reach out to others and influence his environment so that it too will be permeated with Judaism. When an individual reaches out to teaching others but his mannerism is full of egoism or conceit, not only will his words not have a chance of reaching the other, but they will have the very opposite effect, distancing his listeners from the very concepts he is trying to teach.

A person may wonder knowing that he is not utterly devoid of conceit then perhaps he should refrain from reaching out to others. The verse therefore begins with a blessing, "you shall build a new house." It is his task to build up his own portion in this world and is obliged to reach out to others, but while doing so, he must make a guardrail.

SUMMARY

- We must erect a fence or barrier around our roof or any other potentially dangerous situation.
- Any time we "build a new home", or are in a new situation with new challenges, we must set up guard rails, parameters and boundaries to ensure that we do not dangerously plummet but remain true to our ideals and goals.
- Conceit is the worst trait. We must make guard rails to carefully control and temper our ego. These guard rails not only protect our own downfall but they protect others from being so turned off by our conceit as to be unwilling to hear our message.

