

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn



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NEW HOUSE, NEW PROTECTION

In this week's *parshah* we learn about the mitzvah of *maakeh*. The Torah states: "When you build a new house, make a fence for your roof, so you will not place blood in your home when the one who falls will fall from it."

The wording of the *possuk* arouses difficulty. The law of *maakeh* applies whether you erect a new house or buy one that has already been built. That being the case, why does the Torah specify "a new house"?

Another question: The *possuk* describes the person who might fall as a *nofel*, "one who falls." Why is he called a *nofel*, someone who is already falling, if he is only a potential victim?

Rashi addresses this second question, explaining that the victim had been predestined to fall since the six days of Creation. Although he would have been injured regardless, the Torah commands the homeowner to avoid being the one at fault for the calamity, because "a merit is brought about by one who is worthy, and a misfortune, by one who is unworthy." Since the person was destined to fall from beforehand, the *possuk* refers to him as a *nofel*.

However, this seems to fall short from being a satisfactory explanation. The Torah refers to him as a *nofel*, an individual who *actually* falls, not merely as one who is *fit* to fall. Why is the potential victim referred to in such a way?

CHANGING GEARS

Every concept that exists in the physical realm reflects a corresponding idea in the spiritual realm. The same is true with the mitzvah of *maakeh*: the idea of erecting a fence when acquiring a new house applies in a spiritual sense as well.

There are times when a person begins a new type of *avodah*, one that is very different from what he is accustomed to. This exists on a daily basis: He begins the day with davening, then continues on to learn his set *shiurim*, and then starts a new type of *avodah*—the *avodah* of going out into the world to make a living.

This also exists throughout a person's lifetime: In his early years, he attends *cheder* and then continues on to yeshiva. However, at a certain point he leaves the four walls of yeshiva and begins to get involved with worldly endeavors. Similar transitions can take place with each person, according to his unique situation.

When a person is ready to begin a new phase and *avodah*, with new temptations and a new *yetzer hara*, he must erect a new fence.

This is the "new house" the *possuk* is referring to. The term "house" can also refer to a person's body and the world at large, which provide a dwelling place for his *neshamah*. To build a "new house" means to leave the security of dealing primarily with soul-related matters, and start to become occupied with physical pursuits.

[We see this concept—that the body can be called a "house"—regarding the birth of Moshe. Chazal tell us that

when Moshe was born, the entire house became full of light. In addition to the literal meaning of this statement, it also carries a deeper connotation. With most people, the body conceals the light of the *neshamah*. With Moshe, however, from the moment he was born, every single part of his body—his "house"—was filled with the light of the *neshamah*.]

The Gemara says that *beiso zu ishto*, one's "house" can be a reference to his wife. A "new house" can thus be referring to the time when one marries and starts a new phase in life, one in which he is involved with physicality more than before.

SAFE TRANSITION

When a person is ready to begin a new phase and *avodah*, the Torah instructs him to build a fence. The “fences” and precautionary measures he has established until now are insufficient. Now that he is in a new place, with new temptations and a new *yetzer hara*, he must erect a new fence.

For example, a *bochur* in yeshiva may grapple with concentrating properly and avoiding *machshavos zaros* during davening, studying Torah with the proper intent, and the like. However, once he finds himself in a new environment, an environment of worldly pursuits and endeavors, the *machshavos zaros* he must now avoid are of a different type, and he must implement new techniques to remain focused.

The *possuk* explains that such fences are necessary to prevent the *nofel* from falling. Exiting the safety of Torah study and davening and entering the world as we know it involves an automatic descent; even in the best-case scenario, he is a *nofel*. However, he may fall even further if he does not take the necessary precautions. The “one who falls” may fall victim to the temptations surrounding him, thus escalating the descent; hence the need to build a *maakeh*.

THE ULTIMATE NOVELTY

A person may come along and say: “The world is a treacherous place. Why place myself in potential danger? I might as well avoid building ‘new houses,’ and remain instead in the *daled amos* of learning and davening!”

However, this is not the correct approach. The ultimate purpose of Creation is that we should make a *dirah lo yisbarech betachtonim*, and to accomplish this, we must go out into the world and transform it into *kedushah*.

The Gemara records a difference of opinion between Rebbi Yishmael and Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai. Rebbi Yishmael states that together with Torah study, one must also “gather his produce,” working the fields to ensure he will have food to provide for his family. Rebbi Shimon, by contrast, holds that one should devote his entire day to Torah study, and Hashem will make sure he has whatever he needs.

The Gemara continues: “Many have adopted the approach of Rebbi Yishmael, and were successful. Many others, however, attempted to follow Rebbi Shimon’s view, but did not succeed.” Although Rebbi Shimon’s approach is correct for some select individuals, most

people are instructed to engage in business and be involved in worldly matters.

Initially, doing so consists of building a “new house” in the negative sense, a descent fraught with pitfalls and obstacles. However, through interacting with the world around us in the proper way—including creating proper boundaries to protect us from negative influences—we create a “new house” in the positive sense: we bring about the ultimate novelty—a “home” and dwelling place for Hashem in this world.

For further learning see *לקוטי שיחות חלק י"ט תצא ב'*

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