

Spiritual Healing in the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Ki Tetze

What is the Connection Between Placing a Rail on Our Roof and Rebuilding Ourselves?

Yearning for the Transformative Renewal of Youth

Mazal tov! *Parashat Ki Tetze* is here, indicating that I've gone through twelve new moon circles and journeyed another 365 days around the sun. A birthday is like a rebirth. It is a time for renewal on all levels, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. I'm so happy that my birthday – during the month of Elul – coincides with the period that we prepare ourselves for the universal birthday of humanity on Rosh Hashana. The sound of the Shofar, which we hear daily during this month, calls us to teshuva – return – and to rebuild ourselves. At this time, we are working on becoming all we can be and striving to rise to our higher selves. Rosh Hashana means Head of the Year. We must begin the process of our renewal by changing our mindset – our thoughts, our awareness, our worldview, and the way we perceive Hashem, others, and ourselves. Yet the longer we have journeyed around the sun the more set in our ways we become. I recently gave a lift to a young woman and asked her if she lived in Bat Ayin. She was surprised that I didn't recognize her as the daughter of one of my best friends, here in Bat Ayin. She not only dressed differently but her facial expressions too had changed significantly. I explained that she looked so different from when I remember her as a teenager. "But that was so long ago, she replied," although it was perhaps only about four years ago. This experience made me think of the difference between younger and older people when it comes to change and self-renewal. Besides more wrinkles showing on my face, how much have I changed during the last five years? Being faced with a person who clearly went through such major transformations, made me yearn to continue to make drastic changes for the better every day and year of my life. Yet, we cannot do anything without Hashem's help, even to transform ourselves we need His continued Divine assistance. I pray for Hashem's guidance to leave the humdrum of my habitual routine so I will too be able to "Sing to Him a new song; play well with joyful shouting" (*Tehillim* 33:3).

Why is the Mitzvah of Making a Rail Linked Specifically with a Roof of a New House?

One of the many mitzvot in *Parashat Ki Tetze*, my 'Bat Mitzvah Parasha,' (I never had one), is the mitzvah to make a rail on our roof. I always favored this mitzvah according to its simple understanding without being aware of exactly why. When we moved into our current home in Bat Ayin, my husband let me hammer in the last nail on the fence of our balcony, offering me the merit of reciting the preceding blessing: "*Baruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'olam Asher Kidishanu Bemitzvotav Vetzivanu La'asot Ma'akeh.*" This blessing is only to be recited if the roof is truly obligated in a fence, it must be commonly used and have more space than 192 x192 centimeters (75.59 inches) and be eighty centimeters, or 32 inches high (like the requirement of a Sukkah). When I recently read Netivot Shalom's explanation of the mitzvah of placing a rail on the roof, I understood better why this mitzvah is so dear to me.

ספר דברים פרק כב פסוק ח

כִּי תִבְנֶה בַיִת חָדָשׁ וְעָשִׂיתָ מַעֲקֶה לְגִגְגְּךָ וְלֹא תִשִּׁים דַּמִּים בְּבֵיתְךָ כִּי יִפֹּל הַנֶּפֶל מִמֶּנּוּ:

"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]" (*Devarim* 22:8).

Netivot Shalom asks why the mitzvah of placing a rail is associated with building a new house, and why it explicitly states “on your roof” as any place that constitutes danger such as a balcony, a pit, and a high place that qualifies for the mitzvah of placing a rail aren’t necessarily a roof. For example, the boundary of the Solomon Garden at B’erot is on a high mountain slope, posing a danger of falling down several meters, without a rail, which was installed when we expanded this garden almost six years ago.

Completely Changing Direction to Embark on a New Path

When doing teshuva, it is not sufficient to repent for any specific detail, rather we must completely abandon the path that brought us to commit whatever offenses and totally change direction to embark on a new path. This is the meaning of “When you build a new house.” When we recognize that our entire core is unfounded, what would it help to repent from any individual wrongdoing? We must desire to build a completely new house – that is – to rebuild the entire essence of our existence. When the Torah instructs us to make a rail on our roof, it alludes to the character trait of **יִרָאָה**/*yirah* – ‘awe’, as the numerical value of the word **מַאֲכֵה**/*ma’akeh* – ‘rail’ with the *kollel* (when counting one for the word itself) is the same as the numerical value of **יִרָאָה**/*yirah* – ‘awe’ (216). Likewise, a fence is associated with fear of G-d through its protective boundaries and rabbinical fences to prevent transgression of Torah prohibitions. The main protection to control our cravings from overstepping the proper boundaries is through the character trait of awe.

The Beginning of Rebuilding Ourselves is Through Rectifying Our Head

The roof alludes to a person’s head, just as the beginning of rebuilding ourselves starts with awe of G-d, which is compared to the rail, so must our renewal start with rectifying the head, with its seven apertures or gates: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and the mouth. Before these gates, we must place fences and boundaries through the character trait of awe. This is because all a person’s thoughts, speech, and actions are dependent on these apertures of the head, as our sages say, “The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body performs the transgressions” (Rashi, *Shemot* 15:39). The eyes, connected to the brain, begin everything. Therefore, we must begin by rectifying them, and then proceed to the rest of the openings of the head. This is the foundation of teshuva. “When you build a new house” – when you rebuild yourself anew, the first thing is to make a fence on your roof – through the character trait of *yirah* – awe. This is like receiving the Torah which also began with the character trait of awe as it states, “The entire nation that was in the camp trembled” (*Shemot* 19:16). Our Sages say that the Torah was given with dread, with awe, and with trembling.

Rebuilding Ourselves on Rosh Hashana Through Fear of G-d

Just as a person has a head, so does the calendar have a head which is the beginning of the entire year. This is all alluded to in “when you build a new house” – when a Jew wants to rebuild himself on Rosh Hashana, the way is to make a rail on the roof – to grab hold of the character trait of awe, just as we do during the service of the Days of Awe. Since these days are days of judgment in the upper realm, also below in this world, the corresponding service must be through awe. Simply speaking, this is because only through awe can repentance be established, as the foundation of teshuva is through awe. The time for all matters of teshuva and rectifications is during the month of Elul, whereas on Rosh Hashana the way to serve Hashem is by crowning Him King over every limb of our body.

Elul is the time to prepare for building the new house and to awaken fear of heaven in all matters. For this reason, we blow the Shofar during the month of Elul, for the Shofar awakens awe, as it states, "Will a shofar be sounded in the city and the people not tremble?" (*Amos 3:6*). "Trembling removes the blood" (*Babylonian Talmud Niddah 9a*). This means that awe removes the impure blood of humanity. This is the first rectification of "When you build a new house," as stated in the Zohar, the first mitzvah is to fear G-d, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Hashem" (*Mishlei 9:10*).

EmunaHealing Exercise for Self-Renewal Through the Metaphor of Building a New House

1. Sit down on a chair or on the ground and allow yourself to relax and feel at ease. If it feels right, close your eyes, take several deep breaths, and feel your heart rate slowing down. Envision descending a stairway. Count down from ten with each downward step you take. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one. You have reached the bottom of the stairs. You are in a vast open space of emptiness.
2. All your old ways have become erased. As you keep searching for yourself you realize that you cannot find yourself for you have disintegrated into nothingness. Allow yourself to accept the feeling of nonexistence. It can be a scary feeling not knowing where you are and who you are. But within this uncertainty lies the hope of a new and better beginning. Are you ready to rebuild yourself and your life?
3. Let your mind ponder how you would start your entire life over. What would be your new foundation? From what kind of character traits would your new foundation be built? How will this new foundation be expressed in your thoughts, feelings, and actions?
4. Visualize building the foundation of a new home. Envision yourself pouring the concrete consisting of your new self-image. Imagine how the new home you are about to build is the embodiment of rebuilding your new self.
5. You are standing facing the awesome Creator of the universe. Allow yourself to be filled with awe, and dread of His greatness, as you start to tremble. Breathe slowly as you keep trembling in awe of G-d. Now imagine the outline of your new house, which is the embodiment of your renewed self. Envision the roof of your house as standing on sturdy pillars.
6. Tune into the roof which represents the most important part of yourself – your head. Which kind of windows does the roof have? Imagine how each of the windows corresponds to one of the openings of your head, the eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth. What characterizes the windows of your home, and how does each of them correspond to the apertures of your head? Breathe into each of the windows of your house and their correspondent opening in your face.
7. Imagine the window rails corresponding to the fences and boundaries you need to place on your eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth. Breathe awe of G-d into each of the apertures of your face.
8. Now envision the general rail on the entire roof of your house. How does it look, and feel? Is it made of concrete, wood, or metal? Is it made of latticework or of logs attached to one another? How big is the space between each log or the pattern in the latticework?
9. Imagine how each of the features of the rail on your roof corresponds to an aspect of your character. This visualization may not be so easy as it requires a lot of imagination. Do the best you can to tune into the sturdiness of your rail corresponding to the character traits that you have deeply integrated into your psyche. Look for any weakness in the rail and imagine rectifying its corresponding character trait.

10. Now, imagine your beautiful new home all complete, with a dining room, kitchen, living room, and bedrooms, with painted walls, curtains, and furniture. Can you feel happy and proud of your home? Scan everything in your mind's eye and superimpose it on the rebuilding of your new self. Mazal tov! You Are embarking on a New Path of completely rebuilding yourself!