



## Using Our *Bayt Sefer* (School) to Make a Safer *Bayit* (House)

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In this week's Parsha, Ki Teytzei, we are taught a number of laws. One such law involves building a "protective fence" for the roof of our house.

**כִּי תִבְנֶה בַּיִת חֲדָשׁ וְעָשִׂיתָ מֵעָקָה לְגַגְךָ וְלֹא־תִשִּׂים דָּמִים בְּבֵיתְךָ כִּי־יִפֹּל הַנֶּפֶל מִמֶּנּוּ:**  
"When you build a new house you should build a protective fence for your roof (Deut. 22:8)."

In the days of the Bible, houses had flat roofs and it was common for people to stand on the roof (King David stood on his roof and saw Batsheva bathing on her roof). This rule would seem to be a no brainer. With a number of people going to the roof for different activities, it is the homeowner who should be responsible for their safety. The building of this fence would protect danger from coming in and protect danger from falling out.

According to the Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin) "a house is more halachically dependent on a maakeh (fence) than on a mezuzah." We can live in our homes if there is no mezuzah on the door post, but we may not live in the house if we have not put a fence on the roof. The assumption from the Netziv is that lack of a mezuzah is a sin, it does not cause physical danger, yet without a fence there is immediate danger.

To many Biblical commentators, this is the first building code to ever exist. To others, their focus is on the word house (*Bayit*). Our *bayit* can be our body or our soul. Our sages based on Mishnayot in Yoma suggest that "One's wife is [considered as] one's [entire] home." Rabbi Yossi comments further that "[he] never calls [his] spouse 'my wife'... but 'my home'."

Our sages continued to teach that building a home can be seen as the beginning of a marriage. The Chuppah (traditionally a Tallit) which we stand under at our wedding ceremony is supposed to symbolize our first home. When we get married we have many added levels of stress (will we be able to find a home, will we financially be able to support each other, will we emotionally be able to support each other). It is at that time that our spirits may begin to fall. We are reminded, therefore, to create a fence in order to stop us from falling. The Tallit is often compared to the Shechinah, the essence of God. When we are wrapped in it, we feel the security of being wrapped in the essence of God. On the first day of school this year, our kindergartners also stood underneath a Tallit, having the opportunity to be covered by and protected by the essence of God (and feeling that protection in our school).

This week's Parsha opens with laws involving marriage and raising children. Each of these life changing events involves building new houses. There is something comforting about the idea of home. We need to look no further than Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* to know that there is no place like home. And a common saying that we all know tells us that "home is where the heart is".

Our synagogues are called *Bayt Kneset* (lit. a house of gathering). Our schools are called *Bayt Sefer* (a house for a book). There is a connection between each of these *baytim* (houses) and our own *bayit*, which we continue to build each day.

Our fences are in order not only to protect us from physical danger, but to provide for us emotional and spiritual safety.

As we begin our school year, we must reinforce the fence. We must raise the fence's height and security. We do this by reinforcing at our *bayit* what we (and our children) learn in *Bayt Sefer* and our *Bayt Kneset*. We must feel as comfortable and safe in our *Bayt Sefer* and *Bayt Kneset* as we do in our own *bayit*. We must take all necessary steps to prevent danger. By doing so we will provide the stability and ability for growth in our emotional and spiritual lives.

#### **AS A FAMILY:**

- Talk about what you learned this week. What did your children learn this week? What did you learn (from the school, about your kids, at work, at a class you took)?
- Model the behaviors that your children learned about (wash your hands prior to eating; say Hamotzi and Birkat Hamazon; go to synagogue for services).

#### **TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, TRY TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:**

1. How does the Parsha teach us to deal with rebellious children?
2. How is the commandment of chasing away a mother bird before you take her eggs, equally important to the commandment of honoring our parents?
3. Why does the Torah tell us not to mix species (plant two species together, plow with an ox and donkey tied together, mix wool and linen in our clothing)?
4. How does the Parsha tell us to take care of the poor? How can we continue to do this today?
5. Why must we remember what Amalek did to us? What did they do to us?