

“WHEN YOU BUILD A NEW HOUSE, YOU SHALL MAKE A PARAPET FOR YOUR ROOF...” (DEVARIM 22:8)

THE RALBAG EXPLAINS that a *ma'akeh* – a parapet built to enclose a roof or porch – serves a dual purpose. Firstly, to protect people from falling off the roof and hurting themselves. Secondly, to prevent the owner's use of his house, which was built to protect and shelter people from danger and discomfort, from serving the opposite of its intended purpose, by causing injury.

We can certainly understand the Ralbag's first explanation. After all, we must do our utmost to protect ourselves and our guests from any harm. The second explanation, however, does not seem to be logical. Why do we need to prevent our homes from doing the opposite of their intended purpose? What would be so terrible if I would construct a building with one purpose in mind, and a part of it would function in a way that ran counter to my purpose? Call me inconsistent or perhaps contradictory if you'd like – but am I a sinner? Why should acting inconsistently be a crime, listed by the Ralbag in the same breath, on the same level of concern, as preventing physical harm?

Why should acting inconsistently be a crime?

Seichel – wisdom, understanding and common sense – is the crowning glory of a human. Without *seichel* we cannot serve Hashem properly, we cannot be successful in life. Acting inconsistently is a demonstration and result of a lack of *seichel*. The Torah is teaching us that it is wrong, and a sin, to act in such a manner because we are training ourselves to be oblivious and shortsighted to the results of our actions. A Torah Jew does not act haphazardly and carelessly. He thinks through the consequences of each deed before he acts, and evaluates those anticipated results to see if they are consistent with his goals. If they don't match, then that act that must be avoided at all costs.

How often to we do things that are counter-productive?

This may seem like an obvious, and almost simplistic lesson. However, if we stop to think about it, how often to we do things that are counter-productive and even self-destructive? How many habits do we have that endanger our physical health (the foods we eat, the amount of exercise and sleep we get, how we drive, etc.)? How many of our habits endanger our spiritual welfare? Do we protect ourselves from negative influences, learn enough daily Torah study, use our time wisely, give enough *tzedaka* and do *chesed* as often as we should? Do we interact with family members, friends and others in a calm and respectful way? Are these behaviors consistent with our goals?

We are leaving ourselves open to the danger of our seichel being diminished

Often we can work very hard to achieve certain accomplishments, both in physical and in spiritual areas, yet we can destroy all our hard work through an action lacking in *seichel*. The Mesilas Yesharim (*Z'hirus*, Chap. 3) teaches us to always take two critical steps before we act: One, stop and contemplate what is truly right and wrong, (what do we really want to accomplish in life and what are our goals and priorities); and two, determine if this action fits in to our newly crystallized definition of right, of true growth and achievement. Just as an unprotected roof leaves us exposed to the danger of someone falling off, so too, by not examining our real purpose in life and whether our actions measure up to that goal, we are leaving ourselves open to the danger of our *seichel* – our most important faculty – being diminished. May our actions always reflect the beauty of our goals, of a life guided by Torah, consistency, and *seichel*.