

EVERLASTING HAPPINESS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

A traditional blessing given to a newlywed couple is that they should merit "to build a Bayis Ne'eman B'Yisroel, an everlasting house in Israel." The Maharal uses the term "everlasting house in Israel" to explain a custom related in the Talmud (Gittin 57a). The residents of the city of Betar used to plant cedar trees upon the birth of a child. When a couple was to wed, the parents would chop down the trees and use them for the Chuppah, the wedding canopy. The Maharal explains that the cedar tree is a symbol of strength. The use of these trees by the wedding was a way of expressing the wish that the union of bride and groom should be strong, like cedars. This marriage should create a legacy for generations, resulting in an "an everlasting house in Israel." Clearly, building this type of house is a goal we wish upon all couples. However, when building any house, the builders need plans before the construction can begin. What does it take to build an everlasting house in Israel?

In the book of Shmuel (Samuel), we learn about the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) Eli and the troubles he had with his children. We are told (Shmuel Alef 2:12) "And the sons of Eli were lawless men; they did not know G-d." Because of their behavior, G-d punished the children of Eli. "Therefore the Lord G-d of Israel said, I said indeed that your house, and the house of your father, should walk before me forever; but now the Lord said, Be it far from me; for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed . . . And I will raise me up a faithful priest, who shall do according to that which is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him an everlasting house; and he shall walk before my anointed forever." G-d punished the children of Eli with having their line, their house, brought to an end. They did not merit to build an everlasting house, unlike the one whom G-d said will succeed them. What did they do that was so wrong? What did they do that they were considered lawless, not knowing G-d? Why couldn't they build an everlasting house in Israel?

The Ralbag explains that the children of Eli were, by virtue of their position as Kohanim, priests, serving in the Mishkan, entitled to consume certain parts of offerings brought on the Altar. The children of Eli, however, took more than which they were entitled. The Ralbag says further that G-d ordained that Kohanim be entitled to portions of the offerings so that they would not have to worry about sustenance. They would then have time to dedicate themselves to the service of G-d, and strengthen themselves in their devotion to His Torah. By indulging in the offerings, the children of Eli disgraced the offerings. However, this act of profanity was not their sole transgression. They showed that they were more interested in physical indulgences than in the service of G-d. G-d gave them sustenance so that they could serve the people and serve G-d. The children of Eli took this gift and

abused it. They, instead of properly executing their duties and fulfilling their obligations to the people and G-d, pursued pleasure by filling their bellies. Because they did not act properly with the "gift" that G-d gave them, G-d punished the children of Eli. G-d did not allow them to build an everlasting house in Israel.

One of the Sheva Brachos, the Seven Blessings, recited at a wedding celebration, reads: Gladden the beloved companions as you gladdened your creature in the Garden of Eden from aforetime. Rabbi Dovid Kviat, the Sukkas Dovid, explained that in the Garden of Eden, a unique type of happiness was present. Adam and Chava had what they needed. They were not wanting. Although at the time they were unclothed, they were not wanting of clothes. They were happy with what they had. They did not desire any further possessions. They only had what G-d gave them, and they were satisfied with that. It is this happiness, being satisfied with that which G-d gives you, that we wish upon a bride and groom.

That happiness, and the absence of coveting, was not present in the lives of the sons of Eli. They wanted more than what G-d gave them, and they took more improperly. They were not satisfied with the provisions that they had. Because the children of Eli permitted their desires for physical pleasure to rule unfettered, G-d punished them. Because they were not happy with their lot, G-d did not allow them to build an everlasting house in Israel. When we recite the blessing discussed above, we are essentially asking G-d that He should allow the couple to be happy with what they have, with what He gave them. We are asking that G-d aid the couple, so they should not allow the pursuit of the material to overshadow the pursuit of the spiritual. We are asking that G-d should help this couple build an everlasting house in Israel, a house of happiness and satisfaction, with a solid foundation composed of dedication to G-d.

R' Yehudah Prero, prero@torah.org

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