

And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made them houses. (1:21)

Hashem rewarded the Jewish midwives with “houses.” *Rashi* explains that this is certainly not a reference to bricks and mortar, but rather to spiritual legacies which are, in fact, houses: the Houses of *Kehunah* and *Leviyah*, descending from Aharon *HaKohen*, and the House of Monarchy, descending from David *Ha'melech*. We wonder why *Chazal* do not mention Houses of Torah, which have been exemplified by such leaders as Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Betzalel, architect of the *Mishkan*, descendant of Miriam *HaNeviah*.

Horav Eliyahu Mishkovsky, Shlita, notes a similar disparity in *Sefer Tehillim* (135:19,20), “*Bais Aharon*, the House of *Aharon*, bless Hashem; *Bais HaLevi*, the House of *Levi*, bless Hashem; *Yirei Hashem*, those who fear Hashem, bless Hashem.” Apparently, “those who fear Hashem” do not warrant a “House.” Why?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the term *bais*, house, intimates something concrete, of an enduring nature. Concerning *Kehunah*, the Priesthood, which is dependent upon pedigree, if the father is a *Kohen*, so is his son through the generations. It can be viewed as something that is eternal. As long as we have fathers and sons, we will have *Kohanim*. Likewise, *Leviim* transfer their pedigree from father to son. This is the reason that *Kehunah* and *Leviyah* are represented by *batim*, Houses.

Torah, however, is not inherited. Just because one's father is a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, to whom Torah is a way of life and is characterized by his diligence and erudition is no indication – certainly no guarantee – that his son will be a scholar.

This is the beauty of Torah: It is available to **all** who seek it, to all who are willing to apply themselves to its wisdom. Stories abound of illustrious Torah scholars whose roots were, at best, quite ordinary. Their fathers were not *roshei yeshiva*, *rebbeim*, Torah leaders. They overcame mediocrity, ascending to the apex of Torah leadership. They were giants who built their own “Houses.”

Probably one of the most well-known insights into “lineage” and its value is an anecdote about *Horav Meir Yechiel HaLevi Haltzshtok, zl*, the first *Ostrovzter Rebbe*, whose father was a bagel maker. A group of scholars gathered, and all but one, the *Ostrovzter*, was a scion of an illustrious lineage. As they went around the table, each *Rebbe* quoted a *dvar Torah* in the name of his father. When they finally reached the *Ostrovzter*, the mood became slightly tense since, after all, what could the *Rebbe* say in the name of his father? The *Ostrovzter's* reply has become famous. He said, “My father was a baker, and he taught me a very important lesson: Sometimes a fresh bagel is better than a stale *challah*.”