

And with you shall be one man from each tribe; a man who is a leader of his father's household. (1:4)

The *Kli Yakar* sees a redundancy in this *pasuk*: “One man from each tribe; a leader of his father's household.” Being the appointed one of each tribe is quite a distinctive position. Why is it necessary to add that he be a leader of his father's household? In his *Toras Chaim*, *Horav Chaim Toyto, Shlita*, explains this in his inimitable manner – with two stories.

It is related that when the venerable *Kotzker Rebbe*, **Horav Menachem Mendel, zl**, was a young boy, a fire broke out in his hometown. In those days, houses were made of wood; thus, they were highly combustible. A fire would destroy a house in a manner of minutes, leaving over a pile of ash. His father's home was destroyed along with a good part of the Jewish community.

Mendele's mother quickly spirited the children from the home. As they all stood there and watched their home and everything in it go up in flames, the *Rebbetzin* began to weep bitterly. Mendele went over to his mother and asked, “Is a house made of wood that meaningful that one must cry incessantly over its loss?”

“No, my child,” replied the *Rebbetzin*, “it is not the house or even the furniture that is the reason for my weeping. I am crying for the *megillas yuchsin*, genealogical scroll, recording my family's distinguished lineage, that has been destroyed. My pedigree was very important to me.”

Mendele looked up at his mother, and in all sincerity said, “Mama, do not weep. I will write a new scroll for you with a distinguished lineage that begins with me.” His words rang true, as he was the progenitor of a *chassidus* that was unparalleled in its encyclopedic knowledge of Torah. His incredible brilliance and utter devotion to the truth rendered it difficult for the average student of Torah to establish a relationship with him. His *derech ha'limud v'ha'yirah*, approach to Torah study and fear of G-d, spawned the greatest *Admorim*. The *chassidus* of *Gur* was among these.

The second story concerns **Horav Yisrael Rishiner, zl**. When his third daughter became engaged to *Horav David Halperin*, the *chosson's* father, *Rav Yaakov Yosef*, extolled his distinguished pedigree. The *Rishiner* politely interrupted his *mechutan*, saying, “Our attitude towards *yichus*, pedigree, differs from the common approach. Most people pride themselves on their ancestral lineage. We, however, focus more on the distinguished qualities of our descendants. For example, my holy great-grandfather, the *Mezritcher Maggid, zl*, lauded his son, the notable *Malach*; while my grandfather, the *Malach*, reveled in the qualities of his son, my father. I, too, take immense pride in the success of my son. This is what *David Ha'Melech* means when he says, *Tachas avosecha yiheyu banecha*, Succeeding your fathers will be your sons (*Tehillim* 45:17). *Yichus avos*, ancestral pedigree, will be replaced with *yichus banim*, the distinctive lineage of their sons.”

These two stories express a common idea: the individual who stands at the helm of a tribe, who

rises above the rest to serve in a leadership position, must be a man of impeccable credentials. He must have *yichus atzmi*, his own personal lineage, which warrants his ascension to a position of authority. Pedigree is important, and illustrious lineage is a plus, but it does not supplant personal qualities. One cannot live off his ancestor's reputation – regardless of its eminence. *Ish rosh l'bais avosav hu*, "One must himself be worthy of being the leader of his father's house."

Perhaps, we might view *ish rosh l'bais avosav hu*, from a different perspective. I just read an inspiring article by *Horav Ahron Lopiansky, Shlita*, in which he notes that each generation is judged on how well it has received our tradition from its forebears, and how well the members of the generation are passing it on. He posits that, in the 3,300 years since *yetzias Mitzrayim* – the Egyptian exodus, and assuming that there are four generations to each century – we, today, are the one hundred thirty-third generation since the Exodus. If we are passing on the tradition to our children, then, apparently, we have received it from our predecessors.

One hundred and thirty-two *rosh l'bais avosav*, fathers who transmitted the legacy of faith, the legacy of commitment, the legacy of devotion. It was not easy. Some suffered greatly; others were victims of the most heinous persecutions; they lived and died for their beliefs. They always made sure to see to it, however, that the next generation was prepared to "step up to the plate" when its time to lead materialized.

Every Jew must view himself as a "leader of his father's household." We are not here just for the "ride." We have an obligation and a responsibility to assure that what we have received is transmitted to our children – or else we have failed in our function as parents. We are the keepers of a treasure that has traveled one hundred and thirty-two generations. It is our sacred duty to pass it on in its pristine nature.

Ostensibly, there are those who have difficulty accepting this charge. They either feel unworthy of the task or they simply do not acknowledge its significance. They forget that as Jews we are different – very different – with greater responsibilities and a higher calling. This idea was aptly expressed by a secular Jew, Benjamin Disraeli.

In one of his most famous responses in the English Parliament, Disraeli, born a Jew, but baptized by his father as a child, answered a slight to his Jewish ancestry with this famous quote. Daniel O'Connell, an Irish Catholic politician, made a negative reference to Disraeli's Jewish lineage. The Prime Minister replied, "Yes, I am a Jew, and, when the ancestors of the right honorable gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were Priests in the Temple of Solomon."

We have so much pride to share with our children. Who but the Jewish nation has been reviled, persecuted, put to death, yet has survived all of our antagonists? We are the eternal nation. Thus, we must perpetuate our legacy by transmitting it to the next generation.