

## Because the midwives feared G-d, He gave them houses. (1:21)

*Rashi* explains that these houses were the houses of *Kehunah*, *Leviyah* and *Malchus*. *Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl*, expounds on *Rashi*, demonstrating that what appears to be a homiletic interpretation (*bayis*/house is a structure of wood and stone – not a family. Thus, one must apply an interpretive approach in order to translate *bayis* to be a family) is actually the definitive meaning of the word. The Torah here defines *bayis* as the continuation/extension of the family unit: *Bais Aharon barchu es Hashem*, “House of Aharon, bless Hashem.” When we say this, we are expressing the fundamental nature of the descendants of Aharon *HaKohen*. Not only is each *Kohen* a physical descendant of Aharon, but he is also a living continuation of Aharon’s work and represents the fundamental principles and values which he established. Thus, when *Kohanim* perform their priestly duties, such as blessing the people, they call to mind that as descendants of Aharon *HaKohen/Bais Aharon*, they represent continuity. Aharon lives on through their commitment to upholding the duties of *Kehunah*. Each of them is the living embodiment and extension of the first *Kohen*, the Patriarch and Progenitor of *Bais Aharon*.

A debate takes place in the *Talmud Menachos* 53a concerning the value of *yichus*, pedigree, with the *Rabbanan* positing that one who has great *yichus* is worthy of great honor. Indeed, his presence at a function elevates and gives eminence to the function. Rabbi Preida disagrees, contending that it all emanates from his Torah scholarship. If he has developed a high degree of erudition, then he is certainly deserving of honor. If, however, his only worthiness is his pedigree, then he is far from honorable.

Essentially, *Chazal* are teaching us that pedigree, in and of itself, has no intrinsic value. A person should be judged by his own personal achievement – not by that of his forebears. On a deeper level, explains *Rav Belsky*, *Chazal* are teaching us that *yichus* begets responsibility. The greater one’s pedigree, the greater and loftier is his responsibility to live up to his *yichus*. Pedigree is not simply a privilege; it is an enormous responsibility.

The offspring of Aharon *HaKohen* (this applies to anyone who carries the “yoke” of *yichus* upon his shoulders) carry the priestly responsibility. They may not relinquish it. They are obligated to carry the tradition of Aharon *HaKohen* and lead a life of harmony with the principles of *Bais Aharon*. They are Aharon *HaKohen*’s living legacy. If they fail to honor that tradition, they are dishonoring *Bais Aharon*. Therefore, *Va’yaas lahem batim* means that Hashem imbued the *yiraas Shomayim*, G-d-fearing characteristic that personified both Shifrah and Puah, deeply within the character of their descendants. *Yiraas Shomayim* became a family trait, part of their familial DNA. These families who were noted for their spiritual achievement, their ability to rise above their inclinations, who served as exemplars of *yiraas Shomayim*, heralded from Shifrah and Puah. *Chazal* identify these families as *Leviim*, *Kohanim* and *Melachim*.