

Parshat Naso

Rav Shimon Schwab was the *rav* of the *Yekkishe* community in Washington Heights for the last 35 years of his life. In his work, *Me'ein Beit HaShoeva*, Rav Schwab makes an astounding point in relation to this week's *Haftora*. Manoach's wife is informed first about being blessed with a child. She is told that he (*Shimshon*) will be a *Nazir* and that both parents are instructed to follow the identical laws that *Shimshon* will need to follow (no cutting of hair, contact with a corpse and no grape products).

After *Manoach* initially hears from his wife that their unborn child will be a *Nazir*, he is intent on hearing the news straight from the angel's mouth. Why didn't he believe his wife? Rav Schwab explains that *Manoach* was bothered by the following, "How can I teach my son to be a *Nazir* if I myself am not a *Nazir*?" To this, *Hashem* sent an angel who tells *Manoach*, *mikol asher amarti eileha tishmor* – if you want your son to follow these laws, you personally must also follow them.

The lesson, as has been discussed many times before, is clear. If we want to be successful in educating our children, we must lead by example.

In a similar vein, but even more compelling, the *Chizkuni* puts forth a beautiful idea. *Parshas Naso* opens in the midst of a conversation of the specific responsibilities of the different groups of *Leviim* while *Bnei Yisrael* traveled in the desert. A few times in the *Torah*, *Hashem* highlights the transition of the elite class amongst *Knesset Yisrael* – from the firstborn to the tribe of *Levi* – "*VaEkach et HaLeviim, tachat kol bechor bivnei yisrael*".

Originally, the *Bechorim* were to be G-d's legion of honor, the legion of the King – *Hashem's* upper crest – however, in the aftermath of the *Chet HaEgel*, the firstborn were replaced by the *Leviim*.

At first, the set up was more democratic. Each tribe was represented by their tribe's many firstborns. The original system seemed so much more fair and equitable.

In the new system, with only *Levi* as the nation's elite, most of *Bnei Yisrael* had very little or no access to the *mikdash*, the *mishkan* and *Beit HaMikdash*. They no longer had a front row seat. It's true that the firstborn retain certain elements of their previous days, but not anything that could've been.

Why did that need to be? Why was this transition necessary? Why was it something *Hashem* felt compelled to do?

The *Chizkuni* doesn't take for granted that this switch seems to reek of elitism and addresses it in a magnificent way.

Imagine a scenario where a father is a *Bechor* – and he is working in the *Beit HaMikdash* or *Mishkan*. The father is thinking about his special tasks day and night. That consumes him and it's how he's been trained and nurtured, to be one who works in the holiest office. This father has

knowledge and experiences that he wants to share.....but he has no *bechor*. He has no one to follow in his footsteps.

And imagine the opposite scenario. The son is a *bechor*, yet his father is not. Who will he learn from?

The result is that his father will need to outsource his *chinuch*. With this system, the *mesorah* is not as smooth, clean or as neat as it should be.

The *Chinuch* and *Mesorah* become fragmented. It breaks down and potentially becomes a broken system.

That is why the switch was necessary.

Hashem wanted the *Leviim* because it is the ideal way to educate and trust that the *Mesorah* will endure. With the new system, parent educates the child. The *Kohen* parent educates their children to be kohanim. The *Levi* parent educates their children to be *leviim*. I'm a *Yisrael* and I educate my child to be a *yisrael*.

The system originally set up wouldn't have always allowed for that – that's why according to the *Chizkuni*, G-D needed to replace the *bechorim* with the *leviim*. (The unaddressed question is why did Hashem ever have the original system in the first place. I do not have an answer to that question but would love any ideas)

Both the *Chizkuni*, writing in the 13th century and Rav Schwab, in the previous one, are stressing the same idea. Parents are the primary and most pivotal educators in the lives of their children. As our homes continue to act as shuls and schools, in addition to homes, these ideas demand more and more thought and reflection.

Shabbat Shalom!