



Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

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Today's Torah

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Shabbat Parashat Bemidbar/Shabbat Erev Shavuot
May 19, 2018 - 5 Sivan 5778



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We're All Parents, We're All Teachers

Torah Reading: Numbers 1:1 - 4:20

Haftarah Reading: Hosea 2:1 - 22

This week we begin the fourth book of the Torah, Sefer Bamidbar. We turn away from Priestly responsibilities centered in the tabernacle, and return our focus to the narrative of the Children of Israel wandering in the desert, in Hebrew "Bamidbar." There is a passage in this Parshah that always grabs my attention, "And

these are the offspring of Aaron and Moses on the day that God spoke with Moses on Mt. Sinai. These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the firstborn was Nadav, and Avihua, Elazar and Ithamar. These were the names of the sons of Aaron..." (Num. 3:1-3) Moses's children are not named until much later.

As a Rabbi and as a parent, I always find myself jarred by the lack of description of Moses as husband or father. Is it that Moses does not prioritize his family life amongst the incredible demands of his leadership position? Does Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our Rabbi, forgo his responsibilities to his immediate family in order to fulfil his role for our extended national one? What does this passage teach me about Moses?

The Sages of the Talmud recognize this same issue. In Tractate Sanhedrin, "Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: He who teaches another's child the Torah, Scripture raises the teacher's status to be as if he or she had been the parent, as it says, 'And these are the offspring of Aaron and Moses...' Then it is written, 'These are the names of the sons of Aaron...' Let this teach you that Aaron fathered them and Moses taught them; therefore they are called by Moses's name as well." (Sanhedrin 19b) The Rabbis of the Talmud take the passage from the Torah and turn it into a beautiful teaching moment. Moses should be viewed as if he was also the parent of Aaron's sons, because he was their teacher.

Our lives are shaped by many different people. The Talmud wants us to concern ourselves less with the authority of parenting or the credit of parenting, and concern ourselves more with the process of raising children. While I try my best at parenting, I can recognize my limitations. I so enjoy playing catch with my son and going to his Little League games, but I understand that I lack the patience to be his coach. The fact that I'm not his baseball coach does not degrade me as a parent. So it should go for teaching our children Torah as well. We should want our children to learn Torah from the most qualified, apt, and passionate teachers. Aaron maintained the humility and perspective to want his children to learn Torah from Moses.

Perhaps, the beauty of this passage is about Aaron, who supported his children as a father and also welcomed the wisdom and influence of his younger brother. Maybe, I shouldn't be looking to pass judgement on Moses as a parent but value him as my teacher as well.

Shifting the focus of the passage from Moses to Aaron demands that we all look at one another as teachers, as influencers of all of our children. And that is why it matters so much in which community we raise our children, and in which school we send them, and in whose classroom they learn. If we look at every adult that children encounter as a possible teacher, that demands each of us to offer our very best at all times. Any moment can be a teachable moment. Any moment can be a learnable moment.

Because it's possible that my son might not grow up to be rabbi. He might grow up to be play professional baseball. And let us say, Amen.

Rabbi Nolan Lebovitz is thrilled to serve at Adat Shalom in West Los Angeles. Before studying to become a rabbi, he worked as a filmmaker in Hollywood. Recently, his second documentary "Roadmap Jerusalem" was released. Rabbi Lebovitz tours the country speaking at community screenings of his film, which encourages communities to advocate for Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel according to three arguments -- Biblical narrative, archeology/history, and modern politics. In 2015, his first documentary "Roadmap Genesis" was released, which is about the central role of the first book of the bible in American society. He received his ordination from the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in May, 2016.



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