



## DIVREI MENACHEM

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### Moshe, the Mishkan, and the Missing Sons

In Parshat Pikudei, we learn of the Mishkan's completion. One can imagine the sense of relief now that the Shechinah would return to rest among the people after the terrifying events of the Golden Calf. Now, Hashem commands Moshe to set up the Mishkan and sanctify both Aharon and his children to serve Him, and take on the mantle of the priesthood for generations to come.

But why did Moshe's sons not have any significant role in the Mishkan? What happened to them?

Perhaps the Midrash Tanchuma (Pinchas 11) provides an answer. When Moshe sought a leader to follow him, Hashem said: "Your sons sat idly and were not involved with Torah. It is appropriate that Joshua who served you serve Israel."

So, Moshe's sons, Gershom and Eliezer, were not meritorious. While still in Egypt, Moshe had sent them off with Zipporah to Yitro's (then) idol-worshipping home in Midian, where it appears the boys (especially Gershom) picked up the pagan rituals. Only years later did the sons join their father in the desert (Shemot 18:1-6), the Torah's last mention of them.

Dr. Maurice Mizrahi draws our attention to *Divrei Hayamim* where we read that "the sons of Gershom [were] Shevuel the Chief. And the sons of Eliezer [were] Rehavia the Chief. Eliezer had no other sons, but the sons of Rehavia were very numerous" [1 Chronicles: 23:14-17]. Moshe's many descendants, however, disappear from history. Notably unlisted is Gershom's "other" son, Yonatan, an idol-worshiper (see *Shoftim*: 18:30) who is linked to Menashe, a notorious idol-worshipping king of Israel (Bava Batra 109b). According to some, Shevuel and Yonatan are the same. King David later appoints Shevuel "ruler over the treasuries" [1 Chronicles: 26:24], perhaps to lure him away from his idol-worshipping instincts [cf. Song of Songs Rabbah 2:18], but Shevuel relapsed in any event.

Notably, in the Aleppo Codex (10th century), the letter 'Nun' in the word *Menashe* is raised, not so much to draw our attention to the idol-worship, but more, in the words of Dr. Mizrahi, as a warning to take the education of our children seriously. While priesthood and monarchy are hereditary, the crown of the Torah must be earned. If Moshe Rabbeinu's children slipped away, how much more so do we have to keep an eye on our children's education, however vital our status in the community, our missions, or our work demands. ■

Shabbat Shalom! Menachem Persoff