



Sevara

Torah, reasoned.

Parashat Noach

Genesis 6:9 – 11:32 · 3 divrei Torah

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In simple, clear language

6

The Repeated Command “Be Fruitful and Multiply”

In brief: The command “Be fruitful and multiply” was given twice: to Adam, and then to Noach. Why repeat it? Because the mitzvah exists for the survival of the human species, so it lapses when humanity no longer deserves to continue. After the Flood, when God again wanted mankind to exist, He restored it. This reveals a surprising relationship between life and mitzvot: mitzvot without life are not mitzvot, but life without mitzvot is not life either.

The repetition

The command “Be fruitful and multiply” is given to Adam (Genesis 1:28), and repeated to Noach and his sons in our parasha (9:1; 9:7). According to Maimonides (Sefer HaMitzvot, positive commandment 212), the mitzvah was already given to Adam, which is why he cites it from the verse in Bereshit. If so, why was it given again to Noach and his sons?

Maimonides also defines the purpose of the mitzvah: “to be fruitful and multiply **in order to preserve the species.**” In other words, the mitzvah is not only meant for each person to have children, but for the continuity of the human race.

A puzzling passage in Bava Batra

At the end of the chapter Chezkat HaBatim (Bava Batra 60b), two statements of Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha appear:

1. **Meat and wine:** since the destruction of the Temple, it would have been fitting to forbid eating meat and drinking wine. But they did not forbid it, because “a decree is not imposed on the public unless most of the public can bear it.”
2. **Marriage:** since the wicked kingdom has been forbidding us to keep the mitzvot, it would have been fitting to forbid marrying and having children, “and the seed of Abraham our father would come to an end of itself.” But they did not forbid it, because “better that they sin unknowingly than knowingly.”

Tosafot (ibid., s.v. Din) ask: how can one forbid what the Torah commands? They answer: it refers only to someone who already has a son and a daughter.

But there is a greater difficulty here. Why is one rule stated for meat and wine, and another for marriage? The rule “better that they sin unknowingly” applies when one hesitates whether to rebuke someone who is already sinning. If he is rebuked and does not listen, he will sin knowingly. If he is

not rebuked, he will sin without knowing, which is less bad. But here, if nothing is forbidden, there is no sin at all: whoever has children is fulfilling a mitzvah. So what “unknowing sin” is there?

It follows that the Gemara understands it differently. By Torah law, when a wicked kingdom prevents us from keeping the mitzvot, there is no mitzvah to have children, and it is even forbidden. The question was not whether to issue a new prohibition, but whether to tell the public about the prohibition that already exists. That is why the rule “better that they sin unknowingly” fits here. And accordingly, the question of Tosafot never even arises: the Sages did not cancel a mitzvah. In such a situation, it simply does not exist.

This has an amusing consequence. Those who knew the halakha did not have children. Only those who did not know, the simple folk, went on having them. In other words, we are all descended from the simple folk of that generation.

Back to the repetition

Adam was indeed commanded to be fruitful and multiply. But then came the generation of the Flood, which corrupted its ways. God regretted having created man, and sought to destroy humanity.

We have seen that under a wicked kingdom, when the child will not be able to keep the mitzvot, there is no mitzvah to have children. All the more so when God Himself no longer wants humanity to exist. And the purpose of the mitzvah is “to preserve the species.” So in the generation of the Flood, the mitzvah lapsed.

After the Flood, Noah offers a sacrifice, and God once again desires the existence of mankind. That is why He commands again: “And you, be fruitful and multiply.” The second command is not a needless repetition. It restores a mitzvah that had lapsed. And that is why Maimonides can cite the source from Bereshit: that is where the mitzvah was stated, and in our parasha it is only restored.

The mirror image of “He shall live by them”

The Gemara in Yoma (85b) learns from “he shall live by them” that saving a life overrides all the mitzvot: “he shall live by them – and not die by them.” In other words, without life, the mitzvot have no value.

What we have seen here is the mirror image: without mitzvot, life itself does not have the same value. When humanity is to blame, as in the generation of the Flood, God wishes to destroy it. When it is not to blame, as under the wicked kingdom, the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply lapses, and the people “comes to an end of itself.”

In the Gemara in Yoma, too, there are two reasons, expressing both directions. Shmuel learns from “he shall live by them”: the mitzvot exist for the sake of life. And Rabbi Shimon ben Menasya says: “Desecrate one Shabbat for him, so that he may keep many Shabbatot”: life exists for the sake of the mitzvot. So there is no simple order of priority here. The mitzvot need life, but life gains its full meaning only through the mitzvot.

Jew and Noahide: The Two-Story Model

In brief: Is a Jew a “Noahide with an addition”, or an entirely new creation? The sources point to a two-story model: a first, universal story, made up of the seven Noahide laws, with a second story above it, unique to Israel. This also answers a surprising question: why is a Jew who stole still considered “religious”, while one who eats non-kosher food is not?

The question

Someone who stole, or even murdered, is seen by many as a religious Jew who sinned. And someone who desecrates Shabbat or eats non-kosher food is seen as someone who does not keep the mitzvot. Yet murder is far more serious than eating non-kosher meat. So what determines this distinction? We will return to the question at the end.

The seven Noahide laws

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 56a) lists seven mitzvot commanded to all human beings: establishing courts of law, not blaspheming God, not worshipping idols, not committing forbidden sexual relations, not murdering, not stealing, and not eating a limb torn from a living animal.

Maimonides (Laws of Kings 9:1) adds two important points:

1. These are mitzvot toward which “reason inclines”: a sensible person understands them on his own.
2. They are the first stage of a single development: Adam was commanded six, Noah added the limb of a living animal, Abraham was commanded circumcision, Isaac set aside tithes, Jacob added the sciatic nerve, “until Moses our teacher came and the Torah was completed through him.”

The two points are connected. The seven mitzvot are the human foundation shared by all, and the rest of the mitzvot were built upon it.

Two kinds of composition

In halakha there are two ways of joining two things together (in the terms of the Rogatchover, drawn from the Guide for the Perplexed):

- A “fused” composition: the two parts merge into a single new entity.
- A “neighborly” composition: the two parts remain like neighbors, side by side.⁴

⁴Here are some examples:

Yom Kippur that falls on Shabbat. Maimonides holds that all the offerings of the day, including the additional Shabbat offerings, are performed by the High Priest, even though the Shabbat offerings are not specific to Yom Kippur. It seems that he sees “Yom Kippur that falls on Shabbat” as a single composite halakhic entity (a “fused” composition), and not as two separate

Hence the question: is a Jew a Noahide with an added story (“neighborly”), or an entirely new creation (“fused”)?

Two positions

Rav Kook grapples with the question. In his view, the original plan was two stories. But humanity became corrupt, and the Egyptian exile “refined” Israel until it became a “new creation” from head to toe.⁵

The book “Beit Yishai” presents two approaches:

- Israel is the “firstborn son” within humanity. So in the Mishnah (Avot 3:14): “Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God... Beloved are Israel, for they are called children of God.” Every person is created in the image of God, and among them Israel is especially beloved.
- Israel is a different kind. According to the Kuzari, the Jew differs from a human being as a human being differs from an animal.

What is the difference in practice?

Rav Kook shows that even in the shared mitzvot, the details differ. For a Noahide, the law is determined by nature; for Israel, by halakha:

- **The limb of a living animal:** an animal that has been ritually slaughtered but is still convulsing. A Noahide may not eat from it, since it is still alive. A Jew may, since the slaughter has been done (Chullin 33a).
- **Lineage:** a Noahide’s lineage follows his mother, who is certain by nature. A Jew’s lineage follows his father, by force of a halakhic presumption.
- **Age of obligation:** for a Noahide there is no age 13. He is obligated from the moment he understands.

At first glance, this is proof that Israel is a new creation. But not necessarily. According to the Ramchal (Derech Hashem), Noahides are meant to live in a well-ordered natural world, and therefore their laws are determined by nature. Israel is meant to influence all of reality, physical and spiritual,

holy days that coincide. A practical consequence: a sick person who eats on Yom Kippur that falls on Shabbat may not need to make kiddush, since the holiness of Shabbat has been absorbed into the holiness of Yom Kippur.

The “forewarned” ox (Bava Kamma 45b). An ox that has gored in the past and become “forewarned” (mu’ad): does it still keep its former status as a “harmless” ox (tam), presumed not dangerous, with a new story added (a “neighborly” composition)? Or has its former status lapsed completely, making it a new halakhic entity (a “fused” composition)? The Gemara rules that “the harmless aspect remains in place”: within the forewarned ox there is still a harmless ox.

Kohanim on Yom Kippur (Shevuot 13a). Are the Kohanim, despite their special status, still included in the whole of Israel, atoning through the scapegoat like all Israel? Or have they left the ordinary category of Israel, atoning through a separate offering of their own?

⁵Rav Kook ultimately concludes that originally, Israel should have been at the level of “man” like all of humanity, with the unique Israelite level revealed on top of it. But the corruption made it necessary to have an “iron furnace” that would refine the people of Israel into a new creation, so that even its human level became Israelite, “from head to heel entirely Israelite.” His source may be the passage in Bava Kamma (38a): the Gemara there claims that humanity’s level declined when it stopped keeping the seven Noahide laws.

and therefore has additional mitzvot of a different kind. The second story influences the first, but does not erase it.

So too Rabbenu Nissim Gaon (in his introduction to the Talmud): all the mitzvot that depend on reason bind all human beings “from the day God created man upon the earth.”

It is hard to determine in theory when a difference becomes a new entity. But in practical halakha the question has clear consequences, and all of them point to two stories.

The consequences: two stories

- 1. A case between a Jew and a non-Jew.** When a Jew and a non-Jew come before a court, by which law are they judged? Maimonides (Laws of Kings 10:12) rules that with a ger toshav (a non-Jew who keeps the seven laws), the case is judged by Noahide law. Why precisely by that law? The “Beit Yishai” explains: Noahide law is the law of human justice and fairness, and it binds Israel too. That is why it is the common ground of both parties.
- 2. The mitzvah of “courts”: the dispute between Maimonides and Nachmanides.** One of the seven Noahide laws is “courts” (dinim). What does it include?
 - **According to Maimonides** (Laws of Kings 9:14): Noahides must appoint judges in every district, to judge the people on the other six mitzvot.
 - **According to Nachmanides** (Genesis 34:13): the mitzvah of courts also includes the civil law given to Israel, such as theft and fraud. Noahide courts must judge exactly like a Jewish court.

According to Nachmanides, Jewish law and Noahide law share a common foundation. But according to Maimonides they are two different systems: Noahide law is a law of human justice and fairness, and Torah law is a different system. Does this contradict the two-story model? The answer is found in the words of the Ran.

- 3. Torah law and the king’s law.** The Ran (Derashot, discourse 11) writes that Israel has two legal systems. Torah law is meant to bring down the divine flow, and so it does not always order society in the best way. The king completes it, according to the rules of justice and fairness. In other words, the king’s law is in fact Noahide law, and Israel too is bound by it.

It follows that even according to Maimonides, justice and fairness bind Israel, through the king’s law. That is why, when a Jew and a ger toshav come to court, they are judged by Noahide law: it is the common ground of both.

- 4. “Two hundred includes one hundred.”** The Gemara (Sanhedrin 59a) rules: a mitzvah stated to the Noahides and repeated at Sinai was stated to everyone. A mitzvah stated to the Noahides and not repeated at Sinai was stated only to Israel. Why to Israel and not to the Noahides? Because “there is nothing permitted to a Jew and forbidden to a non-Jew.” And Rashi explains: when Israel left the category of Noahides, “they left it to become holier, not to make things easier for themselves.” In other words, a Jew is a Noahide with an additional story.

5. **A Jewish child.** Some Acharonim wrote that a Jewish child is bound by the Noahide laws even before age 13, from the moment he understands them. After all, a non-Jewish child is bound by them from that moment, and a Jew cannot be lesser than a non-Jew.
6. **The prohibition of theft.** Rabbi Shimon Shkop (Sha'arei Yosher) explains: the prohibition of theft is not based only on the Torah's command, but on "the laws of justice" (dinei hamishpatim), the human laws that determine who owns what. The Torah only adds to them the prohibition "You shall not steal." Therefore, even according to the views that stealing from a non-Jew is not a Torah prohibition, there is a legal prohibition. Once again: a human story, with a halakhic story above it.

Why keep the first story?

If the first story is based on reason, do we keep it only because it is logical? Maimonides (Laws of Kings 8:11) answers no. A non-Jew who keeps the seven laws "because his reason leads him to" is not "one of the pious of the nations," but "one of their wise." The pious one is he who keeps them because God commanded them. The same is true of a Jew (Commentary on the Mishnah, Chullin 7:6): we do not refrain from eating a limb of a living animal because it was forbidden to the Noahides, but because it was forbidden to us at Sinai.

In other words, there are two stories, but both are part of the service of God. Even human morality is not an independent morality, but part of God's will.

Back to the question

Now we can understand why a thief is considered "religious," and someone who eats non-kosher food is not. Aristotle already taught: to define something, one states its general genus, and then what distinguishes it. For example, man is a "living being" (the genus) "that speaks" (the distinction).

So too a Jew: he is a "human being" (the first story), distinguished by the mitzvot of the second story. Whoever wants to know whether someone keeps Judaism examines what is unique to Judaism, not what is shared by all human beings. Just as we do not check whether Reuven is a human being by the fact that he has legs.

This does not mean that the unique mitzvot are more important. A murderer damages the foundation itself, and so his sin is more serious. But Jewish identity is measured by what makes it distinctive. This is a logical distinction, not a judgment about the severity of the sins.

8

The Mathematics of Lineage

In brief: According to the Kuzari, the Torah's genealogies record a special quality passed from father to son. Mathematics teaches that a trait passed only from father to son almost always disappears, while a trait passed through the mother as well reaches almost everyone. This has

surprising consequences: for the mitzvah to have children, for the lineage of the Mashiach, and for mamzerut.

The Kuzari and the genealogies

The Torah is full of lists of “who begot whom.” Why does this matter to us?

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, in the Kuzari (I:95), answers: there is a quality in man, “the divine matter” (inyan Elohi), a spiritual power that allows one to reach high levels. This quality is passed down by heredity from father to son. Sometimes it skips a generation: Terach did not receive it, but his son Abraham received it from his grandfather. The genealogies trace the path of this quality, until it reached the whole people of Israel.

Our question: **does this idea fit with mathematics?**

Malthus and the population explosion

In 1066, William the Conqueror conquered England and conducted a census to collect taxes. Thanks to him, we know how many people lived there. By 1800 the population grew from about one million to about ten million: slow growth, about 3.5% per generation. After 1800, thanks to falling mortality and improved hygiene, growth jumped to about 25% per generation. Land was divided among too many heirs, poor peasants flocked to the cities, and the tension between rich and poor shaped the 19th century.

The economist Thomas Malthus predicted disaster: there would not be enough food for everyone, and famine, war and epidemics would follow. So he opposed aid to the poor (“the poor laws create the poor which they maintain”) and recommended not marrying. To this day the prediction has not come true: wealth has grown faster than the population, and each person today earns on average almost twenty times more than two hundred years ago. Whether Malthus will be right in the end remains an open question, considered one of the great questions of science. Some economists think growth will end. Others think that more people means more ideas, and therefore more solutions.

And what does halakha say about refraining from having children?

Be fruitful and multiply: the “fast track” and the “slow track”

How many children are required? Halakha rules: a son and a daughter. It also rules that a man who passed the age of twenty without marrying would be compelled by the court to marry. But the Rema (Even HaEzer 1:3) writes that in our times we no longer compel.

Why? The Mordechai, a medieval commentator, explains from the Gemara (Bava Batra 60b). Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, who lived after the destruction of the Second Temple, said: since the Romans have been imposing harsh decrees on us, it would have been fitting for us to decide not to marry or have children, “and the seed of Abraham our father would come to an end of itself.” But it is better

not to tell this to the people. According to the Mordechai, since it would have been fitting to cancel the mitzvah, at least we do not compel. This is the **“fast track”**: complete cancellation of the mitzvah, and within a generation the people disappears.

Tosafot did not accept canceling a Torah mitzvah. In their view, Rabbi Yishmael meant only that after a son and a daughter, people should not go on having children. This is the **“slow track”**: if every couple has only two children, the people will slowly shrink, because some of the children will not raise families. Worldwide, an average of about 2.33 children per woman is needed for the population not to shrink (in developed countries, where almost all children survive, about 2.1 is enough).

But there is a problem here: to have a son and a daughter, two children are not always enough.

The calculation: three children

Let us start with a simple question: if a couple has children until the first son and then stops, how many children will there be on average? Half the families will have a son right away, a quarter after one daughter, an eighth after two daughters, and so on. The average comes out to exactly **two children**.

A family that wants a son and a daughter: the first child fulfills half the requirement, and then they wait for a child of the other sex. That is the same question, so another two children on average. In total, **three**. And since three is more than 2.33, even on the “slow track” the people **will not disappear**, but grow.

In practice, most Jews over the generations did not even reach a son and a daughter. Disease, persecution and assimilation kept the people at an almost constant size. And this makes sense: if every couple had four children, within 50 generations there would be 100 people on every square meter of the earth. Genetic studies also show that throughout history, each couple had on average only slightly more than two surviving children. The Torah’s inheritance laws also suit only a population that hardly grows. The Torah makes sure that every field stays in the family forever, for example through the Jubilee and the redemption of land. But if every father has several sons, the field is divided among them in every generation, and within a few generations only tiny plots remain.

Today, medicine allows more children to survive, but the Western way of life makes families smaller. In Europe, more people already die than are born. And yet Israel is the only wealthy country where more than 2.33 children are born per woman. The Jewish people will survive, contrary to the recommendation of Rabbi Yishmael.

Who wants to be the Mashiach? “Strong” lineage

According to the prophet Isaiah (11), the Mashiach will be “a shoot from the stump of Jesse,” that is, a descendant of Jesse, the father of King David. Suppose the Mashiach must descend “son after son”: the son of the son of the son of Jesse, without any woman in between. It is not clear to what extent

this is grounded in halakha. Some have suggested that the Mashiach inherits the kingship from David; but an inheritance can also pass through a daughter when there is no son.

If the Mashiach must descend “son after son,” it is like a family name passed from father to son. If only Jesse bore the name “Beit HaLachmi,” how many people bear it today?

In the 19th century the scientist Francis Galton, Darwin’s cousin, noticed that the family names of the British aristocracy were disappearing. Explanations were offered: the nobles do not want to divide their property, stress harms fertility, and even that they eat too much meat. But Galton and the clergyman Watson found a simple explanation: chance. Every man has a random number of sons, and a name that disappears does not come back. They proved that even in a stable population, almost all family names disappear over time, until only one remains. The name here is only a marker of descent: it passes only from father to son, just like the Y chromosome in our genes. So when the name disappears, the “son after son” line has been broken, even if the descent continues through the daughters.

About 100 to 150 generations have passed since David. Assuming the population hardly grew, as was the case for most of history, the chance that his “son after son” line survived is about 1 in 100 or 1 in 150. And if it did survive, it has about 100 to 150 such descendants, because the few lines that survive take the place of all those that disappeared. These are the candidates.

Why does a “son after son” line disappear?

In a stable population, each man has on average one son. But that is only an average: one has no sons, another has three. So the number of descendants in a line goes up and down by chance, like a coin tossed again and again. Sooner or later there will be a generation in which none of them has sons. Once that happens, the line has ended forever: there is no way back from zero.

The puzzle of the Kohanim. The priesthood passes exactly like a family name: only from father to son. According to tradition, all Kohanim are “son after son” descendants of Aaron the Kohen. Genetic studies found a common marker on the Y chromosome, the part of our genes that passes only from father to son, in about half of all Kohanim. Among other Jews this marker is rare: under 5%. According to Galton and Watson’s calculation, such a line should almost have disappeared, or, if it survived, left a few hundred descendants at most. Yet in fact Kohanim make up about 5% of the Jewish people: tens of thousands already two hundred years ago. How is this possible? Perhaps in groups that kept close family ties, such as Kohanim who married daughters of Kohanim, more sons were born and survived. If so, the seed of David too, as a family of distinguished lineage, could have survived with a higher probability. The question remains open.

And among the Shiites. Shiite Muslims have a similar problem. They believe their leader must be a “son after son” descendant of Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law. Most of them hold that the line was

broken more than a thousand years ago. Only one stream claims that its leader, the Aga Khan, is such a descendant, but the list has some suspicious gaps.

“Weak” lineage: we are all descendants of David

And what if lineage passes through mothers too? Each of us has two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and so on. Thirty generations ago we had about a billion ancestors, more than all the people alive at the time! This means that almost everyone who lived then is our ancestor.

Scientists have proved it: after a fairly small number of generations, each person falls into one of two cases. Either he has no descendants at all, or the whole population is descended from him. In a people of one million, this happens within about 35 generations, about 875 years. For all of humanity, within about 1,300 years. Not even mountains, seas or differences between peoples stop it.

Why are we all descended from everyone?

If a person has descendants, their number roughly doubles each generation: 2, 4, 8, 16... After 10 generations they are about a thousand, and after 20 generations about a million. Very quickly their number reaches the size of the entire population. But that is not yet everyone, because many descendants are “counted twice”: cousins marry each other. So a few more generations are needed until the last ones come in too. In a people of one million, it takes about 35 generations in total.

An example: in 1701 the British decided that only the descendants of Princess Sophia of Hanover, through sons or daughters, could inherit the crown. Since the right passes to all children, the number of eligible heirs roughly doubles each generation. After about 12 generations there are already about 5,000 eligible heirs, and within a few dozen generations almost all Britons will be on the list.

	“Strong” lineage	“Weak” lineage
How it passes	Son after son, or daughter after daughter	Through fathers and mothers
Examples	Family name, priesthood	Mamzerut, the British crown
Over the generations	Almost always disappears	Reaches almost everyone

So what does this tell us?

About the Kuzari. According to halakha, the son of a Jewish mother is Jewish, and the son of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother is not Jewish. But according to the Kuzari, the quality passes specifically through the father. If so, every time a Jew had a son with a non-Jewish woman, the quality left the people. Over the generations, most of it “leaked” out. And if the quality passes through the mother too, it already belongs to everyone.

About egalitarian priesthood. In egalitarian minyanim of the Conservative movement, both Kohanim and “Kohanot,” daughters of Kohanim, go up to recite the Priestly Blessing, so that there is equality between men and women.

But the idea is not consistent. If one truly wants equality, it is not enough for a Kohen’s daughter to bless. She must also pass the priesthood on to her children, exactly like a Kohen’s son. Then the priesthood turns from a “strong” lineage into a “weak” one, and the mathematics is clear: within a few generations almost the whole people will be Kohanim. And when everyone is a Kohen, the priesthood no longer distinguishes anyone. Full equality in effect cancels the priesthood itself.

About mamzerut. A mamzer may not marry an ordinary Jew, only a mamzeret. In mamzerut, the defect passes through both the father and the mother (Kiddushin 67b). Therefore, if even a single mamzer mixed into the people many generations ago, we are almost certainly all his descendants, meaning we are all mamzerim. Hence a surprising “permission”: a known mamzer may marry anyone, since everyone is a mamzer, and a mamzer is permitted to a mamzeret.

Some poskim answered that the Torah forbids only a **certain** mamzer, not someone about whom there is only a doubt. And a family whose defect was forgotten within the people remains fit forever (in the words of the Gemara: “a family that has become assimilated, has become assimilated,” Kiddushin 71a). Therefore anyone not known to be a mamzer is not a mamzer, even if statistics say otherwise.

But the Rema (Even HaEzer, end of chapter 4) implies otherwise. He forbade marrying Karaites (a sect that broke away from rabbinic Judaism), because there are mamzerim among them. Yet about each individual Karaite there is no certainty that he is a mamzer, only a concern. And still the Rema forbids, without saying “a doubtful mamzer is permitted” or “a family that has become assimilated, has become assimilated.” It follows that in his view, a concern of mamzerut mixed into an entire group is enough to forbid.

About Jesus. Christians agree that the Messiah must be a descendant of David. That is why the New Testament opens with a “son after son” list from David to Joseph, the father of Jesus. But according to their belief, Joseph was not his biological father. Abarbanel objects: if so, Jesus is not of the seed of David! The Christian answer: Mary too was of the house of David. Abarbanel (on Isaiah 11) rejects this as well. And mathematically, lineage through the mother is “weak”: after 42 generations, almost every Jew of that generation was “of the house of David.”

The same question arises regarding those who claim that the Lubavitcher Rebbe is the Mashiach: his genealogy back to David passes through a woman, the daughter of the author of the Tanya.

About the Mashiach. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 98b) says that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was worthy of being the Mashiach, and he was a descendant of David through daughters. If such lineage is enough, each of us is a candidate. All that remains is to polish our buttons.