



Erev Shabbos Parashas Yisro 5780

Dear Parents,

Among the top challenges faced by our people is navigating a rich Torah life in an alien society, balanced with the need to make a living and live in harmony with our non-Jewish neighbors. For the last two and half thousand years, Jews have endured many different forms of *Galus*, and we too struggle to find the right balance to enable our families and communities to thrive.

An interesting insight into the proper approach can be gained from studying how *Moshe Rabbeinu* conducted himself during his many decades in *Galus* in *Midian*. This week's *Parsha* begins with the account of *Yisro* joining *Klal Yisrael* in the desert. The Torah states that *Yisro* came with *Tzipora* and *Moshe's* sons and says: (*Shemos 18:3-4*)... *The name of one was Gershom, for he said "I was a stranger in a strange land"; and the name of the other was Eliezer, for "the G-d of my father came to my aid and saved me from the sword of Pharoah."*

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The question raised by a number of *Mefarshim* is the order of the sons' names. The first is named *Gershom*, which the *Pasuk* explains commemorates *Moshe's* sojourn in a foreign land. The second one's name, *Eliezer*, commemorates *Moshe's* miraculous salvation from *Pharoah*. The names are seemingly reversed! The first born should have been named after the first event – which was *Moshe's* being saved from *Pharoah* and the second should have been about being a stranger in *Midian*. How can this be understood?

HaRav Moshe Feinstein, zt'l in *Sefer Darash Moshe* (p. 54) asks a second question – how is sojourning in *Midian* something worth commemorating in a child's name? What benefit did *Moshe* receive that he should memorialize the experience?

HaRav Feinstein answers that naming his son *Gershom* was a praise to *Hashem* for giving him the strength to remain in *Midian* as an alien sojourner, and not assimilate into the fabric of *Midian* society. A man of *Moshe's* stature and abilities was surely in demand to qualify him for almost any leadership position he would have applied for. *Moshe*, however, preferred living in seclusion so he could serve *Hashem* without disturbance or temptation to adopt *Midianite* ways.

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This was the reason he named his son *Gershom*. Being saved from *Pharoah's* sword and being blessed with a son to carry on his beliefs was only meaningful and of value if he could then remain free from the influence of his surroundings in *Midian*. Had he assimilated into the life of *Midian* he would have had no enduring reason to rejoice over having been saved from *Pharoah*. So once there was a spiritually anchored life in *Midian*, there was *Gershom*, and only after that became a reality was it meaningful to praise *Hashem* for his miraculous salvation from *Pharoah*, hence *Eliezer* came second.

How well or poorly we balance our lives as Torah Jews in the American *Galus* will have deep repercussions for our children. Experience has shown that communities without *Yeshivas* don't survive even one generation. Families who may observe some basics but lack pride and passion in their *Yiddishkeit* are hard pressed to find even the second generation protected from intermarriage.

If our embrace of the non-Jewish American culture is too strong, despite our own inspiration and inclination to matters spiritual, our children may likely be drawn to the greater attraction of what's outside, rather than emulating the internal feelings of the parent. The insurance of a *Yeshiva* education in guaranteeing our children remain faithful to our beliefs is meaningful, but it is only strong if we extend the fortress-like protection to our home. Allowing in the immoral decay of contemporary society through media and devices into our children's minds and hearts minimize or may even eliminate the protection a *Yeshiva* education affords.

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All the blessings that *Hashem* showers upon us are worthwhile and worthy of praise and thanksgiving, if we enjoy them within our Torah environment, our spiritual safe-zone. Protecting and nurturing our children in such an environment will guarantee our legacy of a Jewish future and will be the foundation for our children's success and fulfillment.

Have a wonderful Shabbos,

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