Jewish Tribune – Yisro

**Just Passing Through**

This week’s sedrah tells of the reasons for the names given to the two sons of Moshe Rabbeinu, Gershom and Eliezer.

Gershom is so called as a reference to being a stranger in a foreign land. The Possuk (Shemos 18,3) says:

 שֵׁם הָאֶחָד גֵּרְשֹׁם כִּי אָמַר גֵּר הָיִיתִי בְּאֶרֶץ נָכְרִיָּה

One was named Gershom, because he (Moshe) said, "I was a stranger in a foreign land"

The second son was called Eliezer in reference to Moshe being saved from the sword of Pharaoh:

וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֱלִיעֶזֶר כִּי אֱלֹקֵי אָבִי בְּעֶזְרִי וַיַּצִּלֵנִי מֵחֶרֶב פַּרְעֹה

And one who was named Eliezer, because (Moshe said): "The G-d of my father came to my aid and rescued me from Pharaoh's sword."

Meforshim note the problem of chronology. The incident of Pharaoh attempting to kill Moshe Rabbeinu, whose neck miraculously turned to marble, occurred first and before the second event of Moshe fleeing to Midian and being a stranger in a foreign land.

Why wasn’t the first son therefore called Eliezer and the second son Gershom to mirror the chronology of the two events?

The Ohr HaChaim offers a fascinating answer. Earlier in Shemos (2,22), he explains that Gershom does not refer to Moshe’s escape to Midian and being a stranger in a foreign land there. Rather, it refers to a much bigger estrangement.

Based on the possuk in Tehillim (119,19): גֵּר אָנֹכִי בָאָרֶץ (I am a stranger in the land), the Ohr HaChaim says Moshe Rabbeinu was referring to his sojourn in this world. He is a stranger in this transient, passing and foreign world.

This chronology is now accurate. First Moshe Rabbeinu names his eldest son Gershom to constantly remind him that he is a stranger in olam hazeh, in this world. This precedes the event for which Eliezer is named.

A famous story is told of a businessman visiting the Chafetz Chaim. He had travelled all the way from America and when he arrived in Radin, the small town in what is today Belarus, he was shocked to see the state of the Chafetz Chaim’s home. It was modest in the extreme and lacked even basic amenities.

The businessman introduced himself and so taken by the lack of comfortable furnishings, offered to refurbish the Tzaddik’s home.

“Tell me”, said the Chafetz Chaim, “Where are your furnishings?”

“Rebbe”, I am from America, “I am here on business and took the opportunity to visit the Rov”.

“But where are your curtains, chandeliers and comfortable chairs?” persisted the Chafetz Chaim.

“Rebbe, I don’t live here, I am just passing through.”

“Me too” said the Chafetz Chaim, “Me too”.

When Rebbetzen Henny Machlis, the extraordinary ba’alas chesed, was sapped of all energy and in her final weeks in this world, she would repeatedly play the song “Just Like You” by 8th Day’s Shmuel and Bentzi Marcus. It’s a brilliant song based on the above story.

“I’m just like you,

I’m just passing through.

Just like you.

My heart wants to feel

Something that’s real,

And my mind hopes to find

Treasures of another kind,

And if you had my eyes you’d see

A Palace for you and me.”

The song would give her enormous chizuk.

Living with this mindset gives focus to our lives. It is all too easy to be side-tracked.

There’s another line in the song: “The neighbours talk, but they don’t understand.” Another message of the song. Not to be influenced by what others think, not to be worried by what society expects and ever changing and demanding societal norms. The challenge is to stay focused on a higher goal and not to get caught up in the day-to-day grind.

Even Moshe Rabbeinu felt the need for a constant reminder and called his son Gershom to remind him and us of this.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**