

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Rus *bas* Avrohom Ovinu *a”h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

## Home Sweet Home

## PARSHAS YISRO 5777

At the beginning of this week’s *parshah*, the Torah informs us of the origins of the names of Moshe’s two sons: שֵׁם הָאֶחָד גֶּרְשֹׁם כִּי אָמַר גַּר הָיִיתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֱלִיעֶזֶר כִּי אָלַהִי אָבִי – “The name of the one of them was **Gershom**, for (Moshe) said: ‘I was a stranger (*ger*) in a foreign land.’ And the name of the other was **Eliezer** – ‘For the G-d (*Keil*) of my father provided my help (*ezri*) and saved me from Pharaoh’s sword’” (*Shemos* 18:3,4).

### A Matter of Priorities

One of these selections seems somewhat puzzling. We can understand why Moshe would name a child after his salvation from Pharaoh’s pursuit; the significance of this event is self-evident. But what about “Gershom,” with its emphasis on being a “stranger in a foreign land”? Is that something to celebrate? And if anything, one would have thought that “Eliezer” should have been the first name to choose, as it memorialized the preservation of his very life. Why did Moshe deem, instead, to bequeath his firstborn son with a name about being a stranger?

The Chafetz Chayim clarifies Moshe’s true intent. Presumably, the “foreign land” to which Moshe refers is Midian, where he took refuge upon fleeing Mitzrayim from Pharaoh’s wrath. However, explains the Chafetz Chayim, Moshe’s aim was for something much deeper. The “foreign land” is actually the entirety of This World. Moshe’s prime concern was maintaining fealty to his Creator and to avoid the pull of the materialistic world. From the outset, he sought a reminder of the true goal, as outlined in the well-known Mishnah (*Avos* 4:16):

הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דוֹמֶה לְפָרוֹזְדוֹר בְּפָנֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, הַתֵּקֵן עֲצָמָךְ בְּפָרוֹזְדוֹר, כְּדִי שֶׁתִּכְנַס לְטָרְקֵלִין.

“This World resembles a hallway leading to the World to Come; prepare yourself in the hallway, such that you may merit entry into the palatial ballroom (of the Next World).”

Especially now that he found himself in the land of Midian and surrounded by foreign influences, Moshe wanted to ensure that this crucial principle would remain at the forefront of his focus. And so he named his first child “**Gershom**” to enshrine this notion into his personal life at the very first opportunity.

David Hamelech expressed a similar sentiment when he declared: גַּר אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ תּוֹשָׁב כְּכָל־אֲבוֹתַי – “I am a stranger with You, a resident like all of my forefathers” (*Tehillim* 39:13). The *passuk* mentions two types of dwellers. A “*ger*” is one who is in a more temporary situation; this is one’s station in This World, as he goes through the “hallway,” the arena of preparation. But the true destination is the Next World; there, one will be a “*toshav*,” a permanent dweller in the ballroom of the World to Come, together with his righteous antecedents (*Toras Habayis*, ch. 4).

The Chafetz Chayim himself would relate how he learned a most poignant lesson reinforcing this idea from a real-life encounter.

### A Place to Call “Home”

In order to publish and disseminate his many *sefarim* (Torah volumes), the Chafetz Chayim had to contend with the Russian governmental authorities. Specifically, his works could only be released if they were first cleared by the government censors, who by and large were

unsympathetic to his cause – to say the least. One time, when the Jewish agnostic censor mocked the sage’s firm belief in the World to Come, the Chafetz Chayim related the following to him:

“Amidst my many travels to sell my *sefarim*, I met a Jew who earned his living as a broker . He would travel from place to place to buy merchandise on behalf of the local retailers, return to deliver the material to them, and collect his fee. Needless to say, this line of work forced him to spend much of his life on the road; only on rare occasions was he able to return to his own home for a brief respite.

“Meeting him on another occasion, I noticed right away that he looked sad and forlorn. In response to my inquiries, he informed me of the sad news that his wife had recently passed away. I tried to offer him some comfort. ‘At least you have it better than others,’ I told him. ‘Most widowers have to stay at home in an empty house, constantly reminded of their loneliness. But you are anyway rarely at home, and so the loss may not be felt as acutely.’

“But he corrected my impression. ‘On the contrary,’ he said. ‘It is precisely *because* I live such an itinerant lifestyle that my situation is much worse. I go from here to there, staying in strange places, eating hand to mouth. How have I been able to endure such hardship all the years? Because I know that, at the very least, I have a home to go to. Eventually, after all my wanderings, I can return to a nice, warm house. This knowledge sustains me throughout all the difficulties. But now that house is empty and has lost its warmth, leaving me doubly bereft. Not only have I lost the actual comfort of my own home, but I can no longer endure the many long months of travel and deprivation.’”

Having concluded his tale, the Chafetz Chayim relayed the great lesson to be derived therefrom. “You see,” he told the censor, “life is very much the same way. Things are not always that rosy here in This World. Everyone experiences his share of pain, uncertainty, and whatever other travails that mark his lot. How does one maintain hope and contentment through it all? As believing Jews, we know this situation is only temporary – This World is only a ‘*prozdor*.’ One day, we will return ‘Home’ – to the ‘*traklin*’ of the Heavenly realm, where we shall receive our reward and delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence. This knowledge sustains us, enabling us to endure the many trials of This World.

“But you, who close your eyes to this reality, are doomed to suffer without respite. Just as with the broker in my story, you have nothing to look forward to, nothing to buoy your spirits through the many times of darkness and deprivation.”

Unfortunately, in this instance, the story did not end with the protagonist living “happily ever after.” The Chafetz Chayim, when relating this narrative, would conclude that this censor ended up suffering a terrible accident that left him severely handicapped for the rest of his life. Thus, he was deprived of both This World and the Next (*Sichos HaChafetz Chayim*, vol. II, p. 18).

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