

Yisro: Moshe's Sons and order of their Naming

[From the Chofetz Chaim and Rav Moshe Feinstein, Zt"l]

By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Shemos 18:3-4 we are told the names of Moshe sons. The first son was named Gershom and the second son was named Eliezer. The Torah tells us that the name Gershom was based on the fact that Moshe was living in Midyan as a *ger*, stranger from a strange land. The second name Eliezer contains Hashem's name *kel* and *ezer*, help. Moshe was thanking Hashem for helping him be delivered from the sword of Paroh. The Midrashim tell us that Moshe's neck turned to marble and the executioner was unable to carry out his job so Moshe was able to run away.

Why did Moshe name his sons in this order? One would think that after a miracle such as the one Moshe experienced, he would name his first son after it rather than the second. Moshe seemed to more focus on the fact he was in a strange land than his personal miracle. The Chofetz Chaim answers this issue with a parable. One goes to a fair for business as was done quite frequently in previous generations, to buy and sell merchandise not found in his home town. Imagine if one tells this merchant to read the newspapers at the height of business activity. A smart merchant would respond with, "How can I occupy myself with trivialities in the middle of business opportunities? Didn't I travel here for business and not waste time?" Similarly, one is in this world like this merchant to acquire Torah and Mitzvos. The Yetzer Hara tries to distract us with unimportant things and make us forget our real purpose in this world. Unfortunately, too many of us realize our purpose only when it is close to the time to 'go home'. Our sense of purpose must be realized and emphasized right from the beginning. Moshe Rabbeinu was teaching this lesson to us that we have to realize that we are strangers here even when we are safe and comfortable.

My Rosh Yeshiva Rav Moshe Feinstein, Zt'l, explained very similarly, that Moshe never really meant to settle in Midyan. He was further concerned that if he became too comfortable, he may not be worthy of Hashem's deliverance. He had to first confirm that he was a stranger and always had to be on guard, lest he be proven undeserving of the deliverance he had received. This is a further message to future generations of the Jewish people. Moshe had to establish for us that we belong 'home' with the Jewish community. Ideally, one should never have to go far from the Jewish community. But when one does, even for legitimate reasons, there must be a longing for home. As long as he/she feels like a stranger, he/she will yearn to be where he/she really belongs, home with the rest of his/her family and community.