

FOREIGNER

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

The people of Israel were headed for their destiny - the day of Matan Torah - the day they were to receive the Torah at Sinai. Yitro, Moshe Rabenu 's father-in law, the former priest of Midian, heard of the great miracles that were done on behalf of the Jews and headed out to the desert to join them. He brought along Tsiporah, Moshe's wife and his two sons. The Torah repeats the children's names. One was called Gershom - "for I was a stranger in a strange land". [Ger is the word for stranger] The other was called Eliezer - "or the G-d of my father helped me and saved me from the sword of Par-oh". [Ezer means help]

Moshe did not pick these names randomly - he had a message he wanted to convey to his offspring. Moshe was living in Midian - safely distanced from the toil and suffering of his brethren in Egypt. His boys were growing up separate and apart from his people in a land that seemed to be their home. They knew of no other residence and they grew in peace and prosperity. Like the children in America today - it would be easy for them to forget that they were living in Glut - exile. Moshe wanted his children to be constantly aware of the fact that when a Jew lives outside of the land of Israel and when there is no Bet Hamikdash then one is in exile. No matter how tolerant and generous the host nation may be exile is exile.

In the Golden Age of Spain the Jews flourished financially and held high positions in government. In 1492 they were expelled along with Abarbanel the Jewish foreign minister. The year Columbus set out on his journey the Jews also left Spain but against their wishes. The freedom they experienced in Germany in the last century suddenly turned into a nightmare with the rise of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. Throughout our history the pattern has repeated itself all too often. The place we felt was home turned out to be just another stop in our much too long exile.

The Talmud [Baba Batra 73b] tells a tale about a group that was on a boat at sea and safely reached an island. They baked and cooked but when it got too hot the "island" that was actually a very large fish turned over and they were thrown into the sea. They were saved only by their proximity to their vessel. The Maharsha explains that this strange story was meant to represent Jewish exile. We travel at sea and arrive t a place we learn to call home until the "fish" turns over and we scatter to the safe haven that is merely our next stop in the journey. It may look like home and feel like home but until we are in our land and have a Temple we are still in exile.

That is the message Moshe wanted his children to be aware of at all times in all places and so he gave that names that would remind them always. We too must never forget and must pass the

message to our children. We pray for the redemption speedily in our days.

Shabbat Shalom

www.raymondbeyda.com Text Copyright © 2006 by [Rabbi Raymond Beyda](#) and **[Torah.org](#)**.