



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM
SHOFTIM / שופטים
WHY IS BUSINESS MOVING TO ASIA?

DISTRIBUTION DATE:

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 2, 2008 / ב' אלול תשס"ח

PARSHA:

SHOFTIM / שופטים

SERMON TITLE:

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A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

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SHOFTIM

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Right after World War Two some Rabbis wanted to declare that it was forbidden for a Jew to go to Germany. Where did this idea come from?

It is reasonable to assume that it came from this week's Torah portion. We read this week about appointing a king and one of the things commanded to a king is "Only, he may not acquire many horses for himself, so that he will not bring the people back to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, for the Lord said to you, "You shall not return that way any more." Rashi explains that Egypt was the horse center of that time and a king desiring to expand his herds was liable to return to Egypt.

Immediately after the Jews left Egypt, as they stood at the edge of the sea, Moshe said to them "for the way you have seen the Egyptians today, you shall no longer continue to see them for eternity."

If so, it is reasonable to assume that just as G-d forbade returning to Egypt, where Jewish blood had been spilled for 210 years, we should also not return to a land where Jewish blood flowed like water from unbelievably horrible murders.

Other Rabbis, however, objected to this tact for a number of reasons. Firstly, they felt that nowadays we don't have the authority to decree something that obligates all Jew. Rabbis had this power only during the times of the Mishna.



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For example, the Torah forbids eating the meat of an animal in milk but meat of fowl is not forbidden. Along came the Rabbis and made a safety fence, so to speak, and forbade the eating of fowl with milk so nobody would accidentally eat meat with milk thinking it was fowl. This decree obligates all Jews, everywhere, always. After the Talmud was completed, Rabbis no longer have the authority to make such decrees.

We see this nowadays in our day to day life. We know that Ashkenazi tradition doesn't allow rice on Pesach while Sefardi custom does. Because this decision was made many years after the Talmud, it doesn't have a binding effect on all Jews.

We find another example by Rabeinu Gershom Meor Hagolah. The Torah allows a man to marry more than one woman; according to halacha he can marry up to four. Rabeinu Gershom, who lived in Germany more than 1,000 years ago, decreed that a man should not marry more than one woman. This decree was adopted by Ashkenazi and other communities but the Jews in Yemen did not accept this decree made by an Ashkenazic Rabbi and to this day there are those who have more than one wife.

If this was the case then, certainly in our times we don't have the power to forbid something for all Jews, everywhere.

In addition to this, the Rambam writes that the prohibition not to return to Egypt, means returning to live there permanently. Going there for business is



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allowed. And here, the rabbis wanted to totally forbid any Jew from ever setting foot in Germany. That is being more stringent than the Torah!

To top it all, there are Jews living in Egypt. This prohibition is written three times in the Torah and is still not obeyed, so how can we hope to make the same decree now and have it be obeyed?

What actually happened with the prohibition against living in Egypt? >From the times towards the end of the First Temple, more than 2500 years ago, Jews lived in Egypt and the communities there grew and flourished.

We find a story during the time of the Second Temple regarding a Kohain by the name of Chonyo. Angered that he was not appointed High Priest in the Temple, he moved to Egypt with a large group of followers and built a temple called Chonyo's Temple and sacrifices were brought there. This Temple was bigger and nicer than the one in Jerusalem; it stood for 236 years and was the center for the Jewish communities in Egypt which were very large and wealthy.

Nowadays, Jews live in Egypt, the Rebbe's shluchim have printed a Tanya in Cairo and a public menorah is lit near the famed pyramids. This begs the question: How could it be that for 2,500 years Jews have ignored this prohibition?

The biggest and most famous question is asked about the Rambam, who lived more than 850 years ago. As is known, he lived in Egypt after escaping from Morocco and he was the personal physician to the Caliph of Egypt and leader of the



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Jewish community there. How could the Rambam have lived in a place that is clearly forbidden in the Torah?

There are a number of answers.

Generally, in the Torah we find two different types of mitzvos. There are mitzvos which are only for when they were commanded and mitzvos which are meant for generations. An example would be the Pesach sacrifice. In Egypt, the Jews were commanded to take a lamb four days before the holiday, tie it to their bedposts and after it was slaughtered, to paint its blood on their doorposts. These commandments were only for that Pesach in Egypt; for all future generations there was only the commandment to bring a Pesach sacrifice.

Rabbeinu Bechayai comments that the prohibition against returning to Egypt was only for the generation that was taken out of Egypt. It was not a prohibition against any Jew ever living in Egypt until the end of time.

There is another explanation. At the end of the era of the First Temple, Sancheirev, the king of Ashur, conquered large parts of the world. His plan was to displace every nation from its country so that nobody could claim that a land belonged to them because they had been there for twenty generations. As the Rambam writes "The Egyptians in Egypt today are a different people." Since the prohibition is against living amongst the corrupt people there, and the Egyptians there now are just Arabs, not the same Egyptians who enslaved the Jews, therefore it is okay to live there.



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The real reason however, is the necessity of the circumstances. In most years in Jewish history, the Jews did not have many options. Most countries did not allow Jews to live there and in many countries that did allow, there was no way for them to make a living. Therefore, when Jew found a place that allowed them to live there and have a livelihood, they went there. The Rambam went there because there was a large Jewish community that was starting to assimilate and saw an obligation on his part to help them. Only he, with the power of his personality and leadership, succeeded in saving them.

Why then does the Torah repeat again and again this prohibition against returning to Egypt? What in fact is so terrible about going back there? The Arizal gives an incredible explanation according to Kabbalah.

It is well known that the Jews' purpose in this world is to "elevate the sparks", to bring every place to its G-dly purpose. In simple words, we need to recognize G-d in every place we go. This is done by fulfilling a mitzvah such as making a blessing on the water in that place etc. This reveals godliness there and teaches the local people about G-d.

The Arizal explains that in the 210 years that the Jews were in Egypt, they succeeded in elevating all the sparks that were there. The moment they finished elevating the sparks, they completed their mission, and G-d did not keep them there even a moment longer!



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That is why there is no reason for a Jew to return to Egypt. As the Rebbe said in a discourse "A Jew should not waste his time in a place where there is no longer anything for him to elevate"- it is a waste of time for a Jew to go to Egypt.

This explains the exile in a positive light. We are not in exile simply because of sins, rather, it is because the work of elevating sparks was finished in Israel and it was time to move out into the rest of the world and elevate the sparks out there, prepare the world for the coming of Moshiach.

That is the reason why the Jews were exiled from Israel and sent from country to country, for as soon as we finished elevating sparks in a certain country, G-d made sure that we moved on to the next. Sometimes this was done at our will, for reasons of business or the like; sometimes, by banishing us from their lands, the gentiles forced us to find more sparks to elevate.

Perhaps that's why the business world and many Jews are moving to the Far East. There are sparks there waiting to be elevated.