

Yehuda Sets Up a Home

Chanuka is over. Hopefully, we are not too fattened and gorged-out from the latkes and sufganiot. And (thankfully for many of us) the crass commercialism of the non-Jewish Holiday season is mostly over. Some people also find the ubiquitous “Kratzmach” (that’s what my Polish born Holocaust survivor parents used to call it) music annoying. I am happy to wish my Christian friends, neighbors and colleagues a joyous holiday season, even though I do not share it with them.

So where do we as Torah-committed Jews do we go next as the “Holiday Season” winds down? What message might we glean as we continue to live here in a primarily non-Jewish culture?

The Parsha has a clue. As our ancestors make their move into Egypt for the long haul, we are taught: “And he (Yaakov) sent Yehuda before him to Yosef before him to guide him to Goshen” (46:28). Sforno understands this as establishing a place to live. But Rashi, quoting the Midrash, sees it as *batei horaah*, literally homes (or places) of guidance. This is usually understood to mean establishing a shul or a Jewish school. Along this line of thought, the Netziv and others suggest that they wanted to live in isolation in Goshen.

Sometimes we need to prioritize when we establish ourselves in such a dominant majority culture. Thus, even in a benign or friendly society, we still need to establish shuls and Jewish schools and a measure of isolation from the culture around us. This does not mean total isolation. On the contrary, Yosef was fully integrated into Egyptian culture. But for long term survival, we need to find some healthy boundaries. Not everything we see around us is worthy for adoption or adaptation. Our survival in a friendly culture will depend in large measure on how we set lines of what we can accept and what we cannot. Solid grounding in shuls such as ours, where we cultivate Jewish relationships and experiences can help us. By relationships, I mean intimate connections with HaKadosh Barukh Hu, with Torah, Mitzvot and Halacha, with our families, and with our community. *Batei horaah*, places which guide us, can give us the connections and relationships which ground us and insure our future.

Shabbat Shalom – and may 2015 be a better year for the Jewish People and all of Humanity.

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