



BS"D

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## Longing for the Old Country

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A new "mishigas" (nonsense) has entered the Jewish world that is becoming more popular by the day. It's called traveling to Europe to see the great "alter haym" (old home). The goal of these trips is to relive the wonderful life the Jews had back in those good old days. Very often, prominent Rabbis lead these trips, whose frequency and popularity are growing rapidly. Virtually every week, a major Rebbe goes to Hungary, Ukraine or Poland. Thousands flock with him to walk the holy European ground where his grandfather once stood. Ahhhh, what holiness! What a privilege to travel to these places where Jewish life once flourished.

In reality, however, the opposite is true. Those places in Europe were never great. The "alter haym" was replete with poverty, depression and sickness – not to mention pogroms, blood libels, book burnings and forced conversions. Europe is dripping with Jewish blood that has not stopped bubbling. The smell of the crematoria is still in the air; it is the scent of Jewish weakness and defeat.

When I think of Jewish life in Europe I do not see greatness. I see tragedy, sadness, persecution, desecration, defamation and humiliation. In short, I see an exile that has been turned into an illusion of paradise. Yes, there were great people in those countries who overcame unbelievable obstacles to become Torah giants. Yes, they built Yeshivas, wrote works of Torah scholarship and started Chassidic dynasties. I am not saying to forget them... Heaven forbid! These great Jews are our pillars of strength and their words are holy and pure. But here is my point: Their words are holy; their villages in Hungary are not!

Think about the message we are sending our youth when we glorify these foreign, anti-Semitic cities. If Radin is holy because the Chofetz Chaim lived there, then the Lower East Side is holy because of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. If Lublin and Volozhin are special because of the yeshivas they once had, then Lakewood and Baltimore are too! And if Munkatch and Bobov are special because of the Chassidus that grew there, then imagine how wonderful Boro Park, Williamsburgh, Monsey and Monroe are... "Kodesh Ha'kadoshim" – the Holy of Holies!!!

Let us be clear. These towns served a purpose and in many of them Torah grew. It is vital we hold on to that Torah – never letting it go – but at the same time it is equally vital we stop glorifying the dirt and rubble these places became. Europe is not holy – period! There is only one place that a Jew calls holy and it's not anywhere in the exile. Similarly, there is only one language that a Jew calls his own and it's not Yiddish. Sorry to disappoint you, but holding on to that language is yet another example of clinging to – and exalting – the world of the exiled, battered and punished Jew. Yiddish served a purpose, as did Ladino for our Spanish brothers and sisters. But those days are over. Our language is Hebrew and it is our obligation to study it and speak it to our children.

During holiday prayers we say that; "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land". This means that the exile is a punishment. We must never forget that. No matter how you look at it, it is still jail. Jewish life was only meant to be in Israel and only due to our sins did we end up in places like Poland, Germany and New York. Stop glorifying those places and focus all of your energy on the one and only place for Jewish life – the Land of Israel. May we merit to meet there soon!

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