



# Likkutei Sichos

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## The Immovable Egyptian

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## 1.

### DO NOT RETURN TO EGYPT

From the verse (in our *parshah*),<sup>1</sup> “so that he will not return the people to Egypt... for Hashem has said to you, ‘You shall no longer return on this road again,’” the following law is derived:<sup>2</sup> A Jew may not return to Egypt to live there (**permanently**).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore — in the words of our Sages,<sup>4</sup> “In three places {in Scripture} the Jewish people were warned not to return to Egypt, etc.”

*Rambam*, in his *Yad Hachazakah*,<sup>5</sup> codifies this law that a Jew may not live in Egypt. (He also paraphrases this teaching of our Sages, “In three places, the Torah warned...”) We can infer from *Rambam*’s non-restrictive wording that this prohibition also applies today. [We therefore find much deliberation among the commentators<sup>6</sup> seeking to justify how *Rambam* himself was allowed to live in Egypt, and generally, how the many Jewish communities were allowed to be established there, etc.]

We need to clarify: Regarding the prohibition against marrying an Egyptian (until the “third generation”),<sup>7</sup> *Rambam* rules:<sup>8</sup>

When Sancheriv, King of Assyria, arose, he confused the identity of all the nations, mixing them together, and exiling them from their homelands. The Egyptians who live in the land of Egypt at present are {originally} of other nationalities.... Since these four forbidden nations became intermingled... all {converts} are permitted {in marriage with a Jew}. For when anyone separates himself {from his

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<sup>1</sup> *Devarim* 17:16.

<sup>2</sup> *Sukkah* 51b.

<sup>3</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 5, par. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Sukkah*, ch. 5, par. 1.

<sup>5</sup> {*Mishneh Torah*, *Rambam’s magnum opus*.}

<sup>6</sup> *Smag*, Negative commandments #227; *Ritva*, *Yoma* 38a.

<sup>7</sup> *Devarim* 23:8-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Issurei Biah*,” ch. 12, par. 25.

ancestral nation} to convert, the presumption is that he separated from the majority.<sup>9</sup>

Given that nowadays, Egypt is populated by people of “other nationalities” who do not descend from the original Egyptians, why does the prohibition to “return to {live in} Egypt” still apply?

## 2.

### THE PEOPLE OR THE LAND

We can surmise (as many commentators put forth)<sup>10</sup> that the prohibition against living in Egypt is not attributable to {the presence in Egypt of} the **Egyptian people**, but rather to the **land itself**, the **land** of Egypt. (The prohibition would hold true even when the term “**Egypt**” refers only to the “**land**,” because “Egyptians” no longer live there.)

This is demonstrated by the ruling and the nuanced wording of *Rambam* in the subsequent paragraph {of *Hilchos Melachim*}:<sup>11</sup>

It appears to me that if a King of Israel conquered the **land of Egypt** with the approval of the *Beis Din*, it would be permissible to settle there. The prohibition against returning was given only to individuals, or {also to a Jewish community} while it is under the rule of the **gentiles, for its conduct** {fostered by the land} is more depraved than all other **lands**.

We can infer {from the usage of the pronoun “its” and not “their”} that the prohibition was prompted by the “conduct (promoted by the **land** of Egypt, and not instituted because {of “their” conduct, i.e.} the **conduct** of the gentiles) is more depraved.” This is similar to the adage of our Sages,

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<sup>9</sup> {This principle applies in many instances when forbidden and permitted substances or individuals become mixed together. See for example, *Yoma* 84b, *Zevachim* 73a,b.}

<sup>10</sup> See at length *Birkei Yosef*, “*Even HaEzer*,” ch. 4 (beg.); *Responsa Chaim Shaal*, sec. 1, ch. 91.

<sup>11</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 5, par. 8.

“There are springs that produce {mighty people}... and {there are springs that produce} people steeped in licentiousness.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, if the land is “in the hands of **gentiles**” — even **not** in the hands of Egyptians — then its “conduct is more depraved” and a Jew may not live there. {The inherent base nature of the land may negatively affect the character of the resident gentiles.}

Consequently, we understand the reason for the ruling that Jews are allowed to live in Egypt only when a Jewish king conquers the land of Egypt “with the approval of the *Beis Din*.” By means of such a conquest, the **land** of Egypt becomes “like the land of Israel, etc. **in every** regard.”<sup>13</sup> Meaning, conquest effects a change in the land itself, thus nullifying the prohibition against settling there.

The above explanation, however, is not smooth: *Rambam* writes in *Sefer Hamitzvos*<sup>14</sup> that the rationale for this prohibition is “in order not to learn from their **behavior**, etc.” This indicates that the reasoning behind this prohibition is in order not to learn from the **Egyptians** (the people) who live in Egypt. According to **this** reasoning, we must clarify why the prohibition applies even today, after “the Egyptians who live in the land of Egypt at present are of **other nationalities**?”

Furthermore: If the reason for this prohibition is that the **land itself breeds** {negative behavior}, then even at a time when it is impossible to “learn from their behavior” — for instance, when “the land of Egypt will become desolate... the foot of man will not traverse it”<sup>15</sup> as it was during the time of Nevuchadnetzar — the prohibition should remain in full effect.

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<sup>12</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 20, par. 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 5, par. 6; see *Minchas Chinuch*, ad. loc.

<sup>14</sup> Negative commandment #46.

<sup>15</sup> *Yechezkel* 29:9-11.

### 3.

#### A MINORITY OF EGYPTIANS

Regarding the prohibition against marrying an Egyptian, *Levush* says:<sup>16</sup>

When did this prohibition apply? During the earlier generations... Nowadays, however, after Sancheirev arose..., Sancheirev already removed them... and settled other people there in their stead. Although a **minority** certainly **remained** who are considered *kavua*,<sup>17</sup> and “in all cases of {doubt regarding a} *kavua*, both possibilities are considered to be equally probable”<sup>18</sup> {i.e., we don’t follow the majority}, still, an Egyptian who converts has separated from the other Egyptians, and “any item that is separated {i.e., not fixed in its place} is presumed to have {belonged to, and have} been separated from the majority, and is permitted immediately.”<sup>19</sup>

In light of this, that “some of them certainly remained” after the nations were dispersed, we understand why the prohibition against living in Egypt applies today as well — because of the Egyptians who remained in Egypt, and who are not overlooked as insignificant despite being a minority. For as long as they do not “separate” to convert, they retain their status as “*kavua*” — and any remaining resident, therefore, is considered to be just as likely an Egyptian as a non-Egyptian.

However, we need to clarify: Why is the ruling (of *Rambam* from his broad wording, and also) of the *Shulchan Aruch* that nowadays, an Egyptian convert is permitted to marry a Jewish woman (immediately) because we consider him “separated from the majority” {the non-Egyptian population}? This indicates that the rule, “any item that is separated...” applies without exception. Since a small number of Egyptians remained in

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<sup>16</sup> *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Even HaEzer*,” sec. 4, par. 4.

<sup>17</sup> {Lit., “an item fixed in its place.” There is a principle in *halachah* regarding doubts that if an item is set in its place, the doubt is treated as equally balanced, even if the permitted item is the majority.}

<sup>18</sup> {*Kesubos* 15a.}

<sup>19</sup> {*Ibid.*}

“their place” {*kavua*}, the *Shulchan Aruch* should have made a distinction depending on whether by marrying, the Egyptian convert actually “separated” (“uprooted himself” or “left”) his home (triggering the ruling “any item that is separated...,” or whether he did not “leave.” In this latter scenario, the ruling that “in all cases of *kavua*, both possibilities are considered to be equally probable” would apply. (This is similar to the consensus between Rashi and *Tosafos* in tractate *Kesubos*<sup>20</sup> that the principle “any item that is separated” only applies to the case discussed when the person “separates” from {i.e., leaves} his residence.)

We can answer simply that {the above distinction is not made because} during the process of his conversion, he had to “separate” from his home (as *Levush* says, “an Egyptian who converts is considered as having separated from the other Egyptians”). However, this explanation is insufficient, as in this instance, to just “separate” from his home {into the general population of Egypt} is not enough; he must “separate” from the entire **land of Egypt**. To preface:

#### 4.

THE TEN TRIBES AND THE EGYPTIAN

The *Gemara* says in tractate *Yevamos*:<sup>21</sup>

{With regard to} a gentile who betrothed {a Jewish woman} nowadays, we are concerned that the betrothal might be valid {despite the fact that a betrothal of a genuine gentile is meaningless}, lest he be from the Ten Tribes {of Israel who intermingled with the gentiles}. (The *Gemara* raises an objection): But {there is a *halachic* principle that} any item that is separated {from a group} is presumed to have {belonged to, and have} been separated from the majority. {In this case, it can be assumed that any individual singled out from the

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<sup>20</sup> *Kesubos* 15a.

<sup>21</sup> *Yevamos* 16b.

group of gentiles belongs to the majority of gentiles and has no Jewish roots at all.) (The *Gemara* responds:) {There is a concern only regarding} those who came from the established dwelling places {of the Ten Tribes}. As Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said {quoting a verse regarding those exiled from Shomron:} “He placed them in Chelach and in Chavor....”

Rashi explains:

*The permanent dwelling places* — Of the descendants of the Ten Tribes; and, “in all cases of {doubt regarding a} *kavua*, both possibilities are considered to be equally probable.” And where were they permanently settled? As the verse tells us,<sup>22</sup> “He placed them in Chelach and in Chavor....”

*Tosafos* dissents:

{The reason for concern is} because in their locales, the majority of the population are members of the Ten Tribes, whereas according to Rashi’s explanation, this is based on the principle that “in all cases of {doubt regarding a} *kavua*, both possibilities are considered to be equally probable.” For {according to Rashi’s explanation,} if he were to go to her, then the principle that “any item that is separated is presumed to have been separated from the majority” would apply, as explained at the conclusion of the first chapter of *Kesubos*.<sup>23</sup>

We understand why Rashi does not want to interpret this passage as *Tosafos* does (although **Rashi** himself says in *Kesubos* (mentioned above) that “if the copulator ‘separates’ from {i.e., leaves} his home” the principle that “anything item that is separated” applies). For according to *Tosafos*, the *Talmud’s* wording, “**established** dwelling places” is difficult — it should have said, “in the dwelling places of the **majority**.” The wording

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<sup>22</sup> *Melachim 2*, 18:11.

<sup>23</sup> *Kesubos* 15a.

“**permanent** dwelling places” indicates that here, the principle of “*kavua*” applies.

The explanation: Since the **verse** says, “**He placed them in Chelach...**,” these became the permanent dwelling places {*kavua*} of the Ten Tribes. Therefore, their state of “permanence” was not limited to their homes; rather, it included the entire land of Chelach, etc. Any time that they were physically located in these lands, even if they “separated” from their **homes**, they were still considered “*kavua*.”

[In light of this explanation, we understand why Rashi concludes, “And where were they permanently settled? As the verse says, ‘He placed them in Chelach, and in Chavor....’” Seemingly {we could ask}: What insight does Rashi provide with these remarks that the *Gemara* does not say immediately afterward? Rashi’s remarks, however, address why they are classified as “*kavua*” — including those who “separate” from their homes, especially as this was then the custom, as our Sages note, “they would construct a wedding-home for their children.”<sup>24</sup> “And **where** were they permanently settled? **As Scripture says**, “He placed them in Chelach, and in Chavor....”]

Accordingly, in our case: Since the prohibition {of marriage} is rooted in the fact that this person is an **Egyptian**, we must conclude that his state of “permanence” includes his presence anywhere within **the entire land of Egypt!** As long as he has not left the borders of Egypt, even if he leaves his home, he is classified as “*kavua*” — “both possibilities are considered to be equally probable!”

We can suggest that *Tosafos* rejects this rationale only regarding the Ten Tribes, since their presence in those places was unrelated to the matter of marriage.

In our discussion, however, where the **prohibition** against marrying an Egyptian is based on his **Egyptian nationality** — he originates from

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<sup>24</sup> *Megillah* 5b.



the land of Egypt — *Tosafos* will also maintain that as long as he is found within the borders of the **land** of Egypt, he is considered “*kavua*” (regarding the prohibition against marrying an Egyptian).

In light of the above, our original difficulty returns: Since some Egyptians remained in the land of Egypt (the permissibility of marrying them is based on, “anything that separates...”), (*Rambam* and) *Shulchan Aruch* should have distinguished between a convert who lives **outside** of Egypt (to whom “anything that separates...” applies) and a convert who lives **in** Egypt, who is considered “*kavua*” and is forbidden until “the third generation”!

## 5.

HE WILL RETURN HOME!

We can resolve this difficulty by prefacing a more perplexing point relating to our topic (as *Aruch Hashulchan* asks):<sup>25</sup> The *Gemara* says in tractate *Nazir*:<sup>26</sup>

A woman does not “move” (“every honorable princess dwells within”<sup>27</sup> — within the home); therefore, she is classified as “*kavua*.”

The *Gemara* continues:

You might argue: Here, too, she has moved from her place {so she would be considered to have ‘separated’}, for we can posit that the agent found her in the marketplace and betrothed her there {to the one who appointed him}. Nevertheless, in this case, she {eventually} returns to her fixed place.

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<sup>25</sup> *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Even HaEzer*,” sec. 4, par. 20.

<sup>26</sup> *Nazir* 12a.

<sup>27</sup> *Psalms* 45:14.

Meaning, even when a woman “separates” from her home — when she is in the marketplace — since she will eventually return to her fixed place (“she returns to her place of rest” {i.e., her home}), she is classified as “*kavua*” (even when she is in the marketplace).

How can we then suggest that {the principle} “anything that separates” applies to our discussion? Even when an Egyptian “separates” {from his fixed place, when converting} to wed a Jewish woman, he is still considered “*kavua*” if he returns to his fixed place!<sup>28</sup>

## 6.

### TWO KINDS OF “SEPARATE”

The explanation will be understood based on *Rambam’s* nuanced wording: “For when anyone separates himself {from those nations} **to convert**, we operate under the presumption that he separated from the majority.”<sup>29</sup> Why does *Rambam* add the words “to convert”? Furthermore, even if he “separates” for whatever reason but not with the intention “to convert,” the same principle should apply!

The intent of *Rambam’s* wording, however, is that the word “separate” here is not to be understood literally — to physically “separate,” moving to a different location; rather, by virtue of his conversion, he is considered “separate.” “Separation” can happen in two ways:

- a) In physical space — a person “separates” by moving from one place to another (and he does not return to his original place).
- b) In status — his *halachic* status, his standing according to Torah — he “separates” himself from one category and joins another one. Similarly in our case: He leaves his previous status and its associated

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<sup>28</sup> {Regardless of our above discussion whether his fixed place is his home or the entire land of Egypt, he should still be considered *kavua*.}

<sup>29</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Issurei Biah*,” ch. 12, par. 25.

laws (as a gentile, or as an Egyptian) and through conversion, enters into a different status {as a Jew}.

Therefore, for him to return to his “fixed place” is not possible — since his “separation” was through an act of **conversion**, he cannot “return” {to his previous status}.

This is why *Rambam* and *Shulchan Aruch* rule that nowadays an Egyptian convert may marry a Jewish woman, in all situations — while he is still living in Egypt, and even if he has not “separated” from his **home**: his very act of conversion renders him “separate.”

Conversely, the other (non-Jewish) Egyptians who remain in Egypt, although only a minority, are classified as “*kavua*.” Therefore, their presence causes the prohibition against settling in Egypt to stand, “in order not to learn from their behavior....”

[Especially in this instance, we can posit that it is doesn’t make sense to consider this minority insignificant vis-a-vis the majority (both from the perspective of the minority {the remaining Egyptians} and the majority {the foreign population living in Egypt}) because:

- a) The remaining Egyptians are a minority quantitatively — in terms of numbers; but here, the prohibition is due to a **qualitative** issue — it is based on their negative behavior. Due to the extent (and) the significance of the qualitative issue at hand, the minority cannot be considered insignificant (just as is the *halachah* with something of great value or importance).<sup>30</sup>
- b) Here, the majority (the people of foreign nationalities living in Egypt) is not **oppositional** in nature to the minority (which would render the minority insignificant). For the behavior of the other nations is also degenerate; it is only that the behavior of Egyptians is more so.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Beitzah* 3b; *Tur Shulchan Aruch*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 110.

<sup>31</sup> See *Toras Kohanim*, “*Achrei*,” 18:3, that the Egyptians act more corruptly than all other nations, etc.

Consequently, this majority does not have the ability to render the minority of Egyptians as insignificant.]

## 7.

### THE TEN TRIBES AND THE EGYPTIANS

In light of the above, that currently, there are indigenous Egyptians still living in Egypt, we can draw additional inspiration in our *avodah* nowadays. To preface:

Although the principle that “the Torah is eternal”<sup>32</sup> includes all Torah matters — at all times and in all places — nevertheless, there is a distinction between Torah directives that we cannot fulfill in practice nowadays (they are eternal in a spiritual sense), and those which we can. Those directives that we can fulfill in practice express a greater quality of “eternity,” for they are also manifest in this physical world, and are visible to all the nations.

Similarly, in our case: The verse says, “You have seen what I did to Egypt... And now, if you hearken well to My voice and observe My covenant, you shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples... a kingdom of *kohanim* and a holy nation.”<sup>33</sup> This implies that {witnessing Hashem’s miracles in Egypt,} “You have seen what I did to Egypt” serves as preparation for what is described in the continuation of the passage: “...I brought you to Me. And now, if you hearken well... and observe My covenant, you shall be the most beloved treasure...” When Jews physically **see** Hashem perform miracles for them by holding the nations that persecute and oppress them accountable and punishing them, this itself inspires Jews to strengthen their covenant with Hashem by fulfilling Hashem’s directive to “hearken well to My voice....”

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<sup>32</sup> *Tanya* Ch. 17.

<sup>33</sup> *Shemos* 19:4-6.

In this context, we also understand that when Jews witness Hashem executing justice with the inhabitants of the land of Egypt — where **indigenous** Egyptians currently live — then Hashem’s declaration, “You **have seen** what I did to the Egyptians” recurs **physically** before our fleshly eyes (similar to the way it transpired the first time {at the time of the Exodus}).

When a Jew witnesses “what I {Hashem} did to Egypt,” he is further inspired to “hearken well to My voice and observe My covenant...” Then the Jewish people will bolster their fulfillment of Torah and *mitzvos*, acting as {befitting for} Hashem’s “most beloved treasure” and as “a kingdom of *kohanim* and a holy nation.”

This {strengthening of our observance of Torah and *mitzvos*, in turn} serves as an immediate preparation for us to fulfil the {prerequisite<sup>34</sup> for Moshiach’s arrival, as expressed in the} verse, “heed His call,”<sup>35</sup> which will herald “this day”<sup>36</sup> — the day of Moshiach’s coming, as Moshiach himself promised — very soon.

— From a talk delivered on *parshas Behaaloschah*, 5727 (1967)

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<sup>34</sup> {See fn. 36.}

<sup>35</sup> *Tehillim* 95:7. {“This day, if you will heed His call.”}

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*; *Sanhedrin* 98a.