



Likkutei Sichos

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Do Not Leave the Land of Israel

Translated by Rabbi Shmuel Kesselman
General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Copy Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger
Content Editor: Rabbi Sholom Zirkind

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1.

MIDRASH VS. RASHI

Commenting on the verse,¹ “Hashem appeared to him {Yitzchak} and said, ‘Do not descend to Egypt; dwell in the land that I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land...,’” the Midrash says:²

Sojourn in this land — Rabbi Hoshaya says, {Hashem said to Yitzchak} “You are a perfect {unblemished} *olah*.³ Just as if a perfect *olah* went beyond the walls {of the Temple courtyard}, it is *pasul*;⁴ so, too, if you {Yitzchak} leave the land {of Israel}, you will become *pasul*.”

Rashi, in his commentary on the words, “do not descend to Egypt,” clarifies:

Because he thought about descending to Egypt as his father had done in the days of a famine. Hashem told him, “Do not descend to Egypt for you are a perfect *olah*, and being outside the land {of Israel} is unbefitting for you.”

*Re'em*⁵ understands Rashi’s interpretation as follows: Yitzchak was a perfect *olah*, which has the status of *kodshei kodashim*;⁶ therefore, for him, all of the land {of Israel} was like the Temple courtyard in relation to the *kodshei kodashim*. Therefore, “for him to be a land outside of Israel was considered like being outside the Temple courtyard, and *kodshei kodashim* may not leave the Temple courtyard, because if they do, they become *pasul* and forbidden forever.” Thus, according to *Re'em*, Rashi seeks to explain this idea the same way as the Midrash mentioned above.

¹ *Bereishis* 26:2, 3.

² *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 64, sec. 3.

³ {Commonly translated as “an elevation offering,” it was consumed completely on the altar.}

⁴ {*Pasul*, in Hebrew, connotes a disqualifying flaw.}

⁵ {Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi.}

⁶ {Lit., “holy of holies,” referring to the holiest grade of sacrifices, which became *pasul* if they were taken out of the Temple courtyard, as distinct from *kodashim kalim*.}

However, when we analyze this closely, we find a few differences between the explanations of Rashi and the Midrash, which highlight a difference in the substance of these explanations.

a) According to the Midrash, leaving the land of Israel would have disqualified Yitzchak — “if you leave the land {of Israel}, you will become *pasul*” — just as an *olah* that goes beyond {the walls of the Temple becomes *pasul*}. However, in his commentary, Rashi only emphasizes that “being outside the land {of Israel} is unbecoming for you.”

b) The Midrash’s explanation applies to the clause, “sojourn in this land,” but Rashi comments on the clause, “do not descend to Egypt.”

These two differences (which are actually interdependent) point to a substantive difference in these interpretations: According to the Midrash, the prohibition for Yitzchak to travel outside of Israel was a consequence of him having to remain in the land of Israel (“sojourn in this land”) because of the superiority of the land of Israel. For the land of Israel for Yitzchak was like the walls of the Temple courtyard for an *olah*. Thus, “if you **leave** the land {of Israel}, you will become *pasul*.”

In contrast, according to Rashi, Yitzchak’s constraint from leaving Israel was unrelated to the unique advantage of the land of Israel, but rather, related to the deficiency of the land outside of Israel — “being outside the land {of Israel} is unbecoming for you.” Therefore, this idea connects (not with the obligation, “sojourn in this land,” but rather) with the prohibition, “do *not* descend to Egypt.”

2.

MAYBE THE LAW FORBIDS LEAVING ISRAEL

Seemingly, on this basis we can also explain the **reason** behind the above mentioned difference between the explanations of Rashi and the Midrash:

According to the Midrash, the restriction on Yitzchak to remain in Israel sprung from the holiness of the land — the land of Israel is holier than all the other lands. Therefore, were Yitzchak to go abroad, it would be comparable to an *olah* leaving the holiness of the Temple courtyard. As the Midrash puts it, “Just as if a perfect *olah* went beyond the walls {of the Temple courtyard}, it became *pasul*, so, too, if you {Yitzchak} were to leave the land {of Israel}, you would become *pasul*.”

In contrast, according to Rashi’s explanation, which follows *pshat*,⁷ we do not find that in the **era of the forefathers** that the land of Israel had any discernible **holiness**, since then the land was still considered to be the land of Canaan.⁸ Therefore, Rashi says that Yitzchak’s restriction on leaving Israel was primarily (not a result of the command, “sojourn in this land” — because of the holiness of the land of Israel — but rather) because of the inadequacy of the lands outside of Israel — “being outside the land {of Israel} is unbecoming for you.”

However, in truth, we cannot understand it {i.e., the core difference between Rashi and the Midrash} in this way. To preface with a question: We find this idea — that Yitzchak was not allowed leave the land of Israel — mentioned earlier, when Avraham sent Eliezer to outside the land of the Israel,⁹ “to my land... and take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak.” When Eliezer then asked, “Perhaps the woman shall not wish... to this land; shall I take your son back...?” Avraham responded, “Beware, lest you return my son to there.” On that passage, no commentator¹⁰ suggests that this {directive not to return Yitzchak to Avraham’s birthplace} was because Yitzchak was a perfect *olah*.

Perhaps we can resolve and clarify this issue — at least in line with the methodology of *halachah*.

⁷ {The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.”}

⁸ {I.e., before *Matan Torah* and the conquest of Israel by the Jewish nation, Scripture doesn’t appear to ascribe sanctity to the land.}

⁹ *Bereishis* 24:4-7.

¹⁰ In *Bereishis Rabbah* or Rashi.

The law states:¹¹

It is forbidden to leave the land of Israel to go to the diaspora for any reason except: to study Torah, to marry... (and even in these scenarios, afterwards) a person must return to the land.... However, it is forbidden to settle in the diaspora unless a famine in the land of Israel is so severe that a *dinar's*¹² worth of wheat is sold for two *dinarim*.

Therefore, in *parshas Chayei Sarah*, when Eliezer asked Avraham, "...shall I take your son back to the land from which you departed?" implying that Yitzchak might settle there (not intending to return, because perhaps "the woman shall not wish" {to marry otherwise}), we can appreciate why returning Yitzchak to Avraham's birthplace was out of the question. And Avraham responded, "Beware, lest you return my son to there."

In contrast, in our *parshah*, which says that "there was a famine in the land,"¹³ the above-mentioned prohibition of traveling to "**settle**" outside of Israel does not apply (as we also see from the fact that Avraham did the same¹⁴ during a time of famine).¹⁵ Therefore, Hashem had to caution Yitzchak, "Do not descend to Egypt... sojourn in this land." Meaning, there was a special reason why Yitzchak could not leave the land of Israel — he was a perfect *olah*.

However, this answer is difficult, in light of an additional detail in the above-mentioned law in *Rambam*:

Though it is permitted to leave Israel {under these circumstances}, it is not pious behavior. For Machlon and Kilyon were two of the great men of the generation, and they left the land of Israel {only} out of great distress. Nevertheless, Hashem judged them to be deserving of death.¹⁶

¹¹ *Mishneh Torah*, "Hilchos Melachim," ch. 5, par. 9; see *Kesef Mishnah*.

¹² {An ancient coin value.}

¹³ {*Bereishis* 26:1.}

¹⁴ {*Bereishis* 12:10.}

¹⁵ As Rashi says, "For he had in mind to descend to Egypt as his father had descended...."

¹⁶ {See *Rus* 1:1-5.}

If we conclude that the regulations forbidding leaving the land of Israel also applied to the forefathers (at least by virtue of the fact that the forefathers {voluntarily} observed the entire Torah before it was given¹⁷ — they even ate *matzah*,¹⁸ and even observed the Rabbinical decrees and prohibitions,¹⁹ and so forth) — then they certainly would have also avoided leaving the land of Israel, since doing so is not considered to be pious behavior (and could bring about a harsh punishment, Heaven forbid).

Moreover and more importantly: We find that Avraham traveled out of the land of Israel to Charan after the Covenant Between the Parts,²⁰ even though there was **no** famine at the time.

This proves that the prohibition of leaving the land of Israel {and traveling abroad} did not **apply** during the era of the forefathers. Consequently, even though they fulfilled the entire Torah prior to *Matan Torah*, it was not feasible to have been careful to avoid leaving the land of Israel. The reason is because the element of holiness of the land of Israel (as it relates to the prohibition of leaving) had not yet come about. [This is understood from the *Mechilta's* statement that²¹ “before Hashem chose the land of Israel, all the lands were fitting for words {of prophecy}; (but specifically) after Hashem chose the land of Israel, all the other lands were **excluded**.”]

We can understand the reason why Avraham told Eliezer, “Beware, lest you return my son to there,” (even according to *pshat*) based on what Avraham himself said (in the continuation of the passage):²² “and who swore to me saying, ‘to your offspring I will give this land.’” Meaning, since this was the land that Hashem would grant to Yitzchak, it made no sense for Yitzchak (in order to get married) to leave and settle outside of Israel.

¹⁷ *Yoma* 28b; *Kiddushin* 82a (about Avraham).

¹⁸ Even though they lived before the Exodus from Egypt.

¹⁹ Rashi on *Bereishis* 26:5 (about Avraham).

²⁰ {*Bereishis* 15:9 ff.} See *Shabbos* 10b, *Tosafos* s.v. “*veshel*,” et al. {which explains that G-d’s command to Avraham (*Bereishis* 12:1 ff.) to leave Charan for the land of Israel, took place five years after the Covenant Between the Parts.}

²¹ *Mechilta*, beg. {From the *Mechilta*, it is clear that Hashem chose the land of Israel only after the Jews entered it following the exodus from Egypt, long after the era of the forefathers.}

²² {*Bereishis* 24:7.}

In contrast, our *parshah* discusses a time of famine in Israel, and there was no alternative but to leave. Presumably, this should not have prevented Yitzchak from temporarily traveling to a place where food could be found {and remaining there} until the famine ended (if not for the reason that Yitzchak was a perfect *olah*).

On this basis, however, a question arises: If, at that time, the land of Israel was not uniquely holy, why was it significant that Yitzchak was a perfect *olah*? This question is especially accentuated in light of the Midrash's emphasis, "Just as if {a perfect} *olah*... so, too, you {Yitzchak} if you leave...."

3.

WILL GIVE OR GAVE

We can posit the following:

By way of introduction: There is another difference in the wording of Rashi and the Midrash. In the context of the Covenant between the Parts, it says,²³ "On that day, Hashem made a covenant with Avram, saying, 'To your descendants have I given this land.'" The Midrash comments,²⁴ "Hashem's speech constitutes an **action**, as it says, 'to your descendants have I given'; it does not say, 'I will give this land,' but rather, 'have I given this land.'" But Rashi, in his commentary on the phrase, "to your descendants have I given," explains, "Hashem's speech is **as if** {what was spoken of} has been performed."

On this basis, it emerges that according to the Midrash, at the Covenant between the Parts, Hashem with His speech had already performed the action of giving. And, at that moment, the entire land of Israel was acquired by Avraham and by his descendants. [This is also consistent with the Jerusalem Talmud's²⁵

²³ *Bereishis* 15:18.

²⁴ *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 44, sec. 22.

²⁵ *Jerusalem Talmud*, "Challah," ch. 2, *halacha* 1.

statement that “to your descendants I have given” is not a promise; rather, it means “I have already given.” That is, the land of Israel belonged to the Jewish people even before they had entered {and conquered the land}. Similarly, this idea is also consistent with the *Gemara’s*²⁶ *halachic* ruling that “the land of Israel is in our possession” — “it is an inheritance for you **from your ancestors.**”]

In contrast, according to Rashi’s explanation, Hashem’s speech did not constitute an actual “action” of giving by which the land of Israel {actually} belonged to the Jewish people from that point onward. Rather, “(Hashem’s speech is only) **as if** it has been performed.”

Nonetheless, according to this rationale, the wording, “to your descendants **I have given**” also still fits (even according to *pshat*).

We need to clarify:

Since we have established that according to the *Midrash* (and *halachah*), Hashem’s speech affected the very land itself in that Avraham and his descendants **acquired** it {at that time}, why should we not assume that this also introduced **holiness** into the land? (Moreover, since we find that as soon as “Hashem created the world,” “He **chose** the land of Israel,”) there is room to say that from that point on the land became holy, and consequently, all the obligations deriving from this holiness came into effect. (This includes the prohibition against leaving the land of Israel, applying even to a person who is not a perfect *olah*.)

²⁶ *Bava Basra*, 119a, ff.; *Avodah Zara*, 53b.

4.

OWNERSHIP FIRST, HOLINESS LATER

The explanation:

We have discussed many times²⁷ the difference between the *mitzvos* that the forefathers fulfilled before *Matan Torah*²⁸ and those that the Jewish people fulfill afterward. The fulfillment of the *mitzvos* before *Matan Torah* were in the category of those “not commanded (**by Hashem**), yet performed.”²⁹ Therefore, such *mitzvos* did not have the ability to transform the **essence**³⁰ of an entity created by Hashem, i.e., to transform the very item with which a person performed a *mitzvah* into a *mitzvah*-object. Only the person, the one who had fulfilled a *mitzvah*, was impacted by it. However, after *Matan Torah* and **Hashem** giving {*mitzvos* as} commands, the fulfillment of a *mitzvah* transforms the object with which it is performed, causing it to become holy, or a *mitzvah*-object, etc.

The reason for this: As the Midrash³¹ says, before *Matan Torah* there was a decree that the higher shall not descend to the lower, and the lower shall not ascend to the higher. At *Matan Torah*, Hashem revoked this decree, allowing the spiritual and physical to merge.

Meaning, Hashem’s commandments at *Matan Torah* introduced the **class** of a *mitzvah*-object (and a sin-object) within the worldly sphere (even before a person fulfills a *mitzvah* using these objects). Objects became a fitting **vessel** for *mitzvos* to be performed with and through them. When a person **actually** fulfills a *mitzvah*, holiness (the higher) becomes actually entrenched in a physical object (the lower) and it becomes a *mitzvah*- or holy- object, etc.³²

²⁷ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 212, sec. 4, ff., and the sources referenced there.

²⁸ {The Giving of the Torah at Sinai.}

²⁹ {*Kiddushin* 31a.}

³⁰ {In the Hebrew original, “*mehus*”; meaning, the essential-character or makeup of something.}

³¹ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 12, sec. 3; *Midrash Tanchuma, parshas Vaera*, sec. 15.

³² {Two halachic categories are being referred to here: Some objects are known as תשמישי מצוה, meaning that they are classified as a *mitzvah* item but don't possess inherent holiness (e.g. *tzitzis*), while other *mitzvos* are referred to as תשמישי קדושה. These possess an inherent holiness as well (such as *tefillin*).}

The same holds true regarding the land of Israel:

Although the Jewish people acquired and took **ownership** of the land of Israel even before *Matan Torah* (via Hashem's speech), the **holiness** did not come into effect (not even the holiness which is unrelated to the obligation of *mitzvos*); it could not be **fixed** within the "object" — the land itself. After *Matan Torah*, however (even before the Jewish people conquered the land), something new was introduced — the land transitioned into the **class** of potential holiness (as a result of Hashem's commandment to conquer it). After the Jewish people actually took possession of the land (through conquest), holiness was actually infused into the land.

5.

THE SAME IS TRUE ABOUT THE OWNERSHIP

Just as this concept holds true according to the Midrash regarding the holiness of the land, similar concepts apply according to Rashi, in line with *pshat*, regarding the ownership of the land.

Since the manner and **parameters** of Hashem's bestowal of the land to the Jewish people were different than those of a conventional transfer of ownership from a giver to a recipient

— usually, a transfer of ownership only changes the domain of the object, not its essence (and therefore, the ownership of the object can be cancelled and displaced through another acquisition, or through conquest, etc., and then pass from one domain to another) —

however, Hashem (also) gave the Jewish people the **essence**³³ of the land of Israel (severing any link between it and other nations). Hashem gave the land

³³ {In the original Hebrew, "*mahus*."}

of Israel to the Jews in a way that changed its **essence**: Hashem brought about that the object — **this** land — became **the land of Israel**.

From then on, the land could not {inherently} belong to another nation (changing ownership by way of acquisition, or the like, is unable to alter the **essence** of the article). —

Therefore, (similar to the concept that a class of holiness, in general, could only come about after *Matan Torah*), this {essential transfer of ownership} (also) could not happen until the Jewish people actually conquered the land — “you have conquered the land of the seven nations.”³⁴ At that time, “by His will... **He gave it to us**”³⁵ in actuality — giving the essence of the land. (This is possible because, “the **whole** earth belongs to Hashem, He **created it**.”)³⁶

6.

RASHI AND THE MIDRASH ACCORDING TO *NIGLEH*³⁷

On this basis, we can explain the difference between the explanations of Rashi and the Midrash:

The reason why an *olah* cannot be brought beyond the walls of the Temple courtyard — and “if it goes beyond... it became *pasul*” — is not because of its level of holiness (i.e., because it goes out to a place with a lesser degree of holiness). Rather, the reason is because this place is “beyond its boundary.” This is a general law regarding any meat that “goes beyond its boundary.” In fact, this law is derived³⁸ from the verse,³⁹ “And any *treifah* {torn} flesh in the field you shall not eat” (which does not refer to sanctified meat). The law is, “Once the meat goes beyond its boundary, it becomes forbidden.” Since this type of meat has its boundary which defines the set place where it belongs, therefore, “Meat of

³⁴ *Rashi's* commentary on *Bereishis* 1:1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ {The “revealed,” or exoteric, dimension of Torah.}

³⁸ *Makos* 18a; *Zevachim* 82b; *Chullin* 68a.

³⁹ *Shemos* 22:30.

kodshei kodashim that was taken beyond the walls of the Temple Courtyard, and meat of *kodashim kalim*⁴⁰ that was taken outside the walls of Jerusalem,”⁴¹ or, “the meat of a *korban Pesach* that has been removed from its group,”⁴² or, “a fetus {of an animal about to be slaughtered} that stuck its foreleg {or hind leg} out {of the womb}”⁴³ all become “disqualified and forbidden forever.” The reason is that “once meat has left its boundary, it is considered to be *treifah*.”⁴⁴

Since, according to the *Midrash*, Hashem’s speech is tantamount to action, and the land of Israel already then (from the time of the Covenant Between the Parts) belonged to the forefathers, it emerges that Hashem’s instruction that he (Yitzchak) be offered as a perfect *olah* automatically established the land of Israel as his place and his “boundary.” (This is similar to the way that by offering an *olah*, the Temple courtyard becomes its place and its permanent “boundary.”) Therefore, for Yitzchak, lands outside of Israel are considered, “beyond his boundary.”

In contrast, according to Rashi, as mentioned, gifting the land of Israel at the Covenant Between the Parts did not affect the “object” of the land of Israel.⁴⁵

Rashi, however,⁴⁶ already clarified in *parshas Chayei Sarah*⁴⁷ (in the context of Avraham’s reply to Eliezer, “Beware, lest you return my son to there”) on the words, “Hashem, L-rd of the heavens, Who took me from the house of my father”:

Now he is L-rd of the heavens and L-rd of the earth, for I have made mention of Him common in the mouth of the masses. But when He took

⁴⁰ {Sacrifices of lesser sanctity.}

⁴¹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Maaseh HaKorbanos*,” ch. 11, par. 6.

⁴² *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Korban Pesach*,” ch. 9, par. 2. {The Pesach sacrifice had to be eaten in the company of a pre-designated group only.}

⁴³ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Maachalos Assuros*,” ch. 5, par. 9. {*Rambam* explains: “Any meat that emerges from its boundary (natural position) {e.g., an animal fetus extends its limb outside the womb and returns it} is forbidden as flesh that was separated from a living animal.”}

⁴⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Maaseh HaKorbanos*,” ch. 11, par. 6.

⁴⁵ {Therefore, according to Rashi, we cannot say that the land of Israel was deemed to be Yitzchak’s “boundary.”}

⁴⁶ {Although according to Rashi, the land of Israel was not a “boundary,” per se, confining Yitzchak to Israel, nevertheless, Rashi still holds that Yitzchak was not permitted to depart Israel, albeit for a different reason, as the Rebbe proceeds to explain.}

⁴⁷ *Bereishis* 24:7.

me from my father's house, He was L-rd of the heavens but not L-rd of the earth. For people at large did not recognize Him, and His name was not commonly mentioned on earth.

(As we have previously discussed at length)⁴⁸ by saying this, Avraham aimed to explain to Eliezer that outside of Israel — where “the house of my father” was found — Hashem was only, “the L-rd of the heavens,” and not “the L-rd of the earth.” For the people there did not recognize Hashem at all, and were unaccustomed to speak of His holy name. Therefore, “do not return my son there.” But in the land of Israel, Hashem is (not only) “the L-rd of the heavens (but He is also) **the L-rd of the earth**, for I have made the mention of Him common in the mouth of the masses.” But, on the other hand, {even} there, the awareness of Hashem is only in that “**I have made mention of Him common in the mouth** of the masses.” The masses did not change in essence, in their lifestyles and behaviors (therefore, “do not take a wife for my son **from the daughters of the Canaanite** among whom I dwell”).⁴⁹

On this basis,⁵⁰ we can appreciate that given Yitzchak's quality of being “a perfect *olah*” [although the importance of the land was not (so) relevant — since the land itself did not (yet) have any special advantage; and the same holds true regarding the essence of the **people** of the land], Yitzchak's inability to leave the land was (primarily) because being outside the land was “**unbefitting for you.**” For there, Hashem is not “the L-rd of **the earth**,” and even **His name** is not commonly mentioned outside of Israel.

7.

RASHI VS. THE MIDRASH ACCORDING TO *CHASSIDUS*

We can also explain the difference between these two opinions in light of the deeper parts of Torah:

⁴⁸ *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 159.

⁴⁹ {*Bereishis* 24:3.}

⁵⁰ {The Rebbe now concludes his explanation of Rashi's approach regarding Yitzchak's inability to leave Israel.}

According to the *Midrash* (and *halachah*), the Jewish people owned the land of Israel even during the time of the forefathers. Therefore, Yitzchak could not leave the land (for he was a perfect *olah*). According to Rashi, the Jewish people did not actually own the land. Ownership only came about when the Jewish people entered the land {and actually took possession of it}; the only reason why Yitzchak could not leave was because “being outside the land is not fitting for you.”

From the vantage point of *Midrash*, {a perspective} deeper than *pshat* (i.e., deeper than the **simple** view of things) but connected more to spiritual matters (albeit as **these** matters also pertain to and affect the physical world), the acquisition of the land of Israel was realized by {a spiritual cause, Hashem’s speech. For as discussed} “Hashem’s **speech** — regarding the ownership of Jews over the land of Israel — is an action.” {This actuated the Jewish people’s material ownership of the land of Israel.}

According to Rashi, based on his *pshat* understanding of Scripture, we only take into consideration (as matters play out in the world of *pshat* — on the plane of action) the physical action, as it occurs in this world. Therefore, the Jewish people only took ownership of the land of Israel by actually entering and conquering it.

On the other hand, the Jewish people’s actions transform the **essence** of the land, thereby revealing that it was Hashem who gifted the core essence of the land to the Jewish people. He did so in a way that the land forever became a **Jewish land**⁵¹ — a holy land.

Based on talks delivered on *Chof Av* and on *Motzei Shabbos parshas Re’eh*, 5738 (1978)

⁵¹ {In the Hebrew original, “**Eretz Yisrael.**”}