

# The Estate of Goshen

By Menachem Feldman

The final two portions of the book of Genesis leave us with mixed feelings.

On the one hand, Jacob was finally at peace; his family was reunited and his son Joseph was the leader of Egypt, the world's superpower. For the first time in decades

Jacob was living in tranquility.

**For the first time in decades Jacob was living in tranquility**

Joseph granted

Jacob and his family Egypt's best real estate, the region of Goshen, where they lived a worry-free, peaceful, existence.

On the other hand, it was a sad story. There was a dark cloud hanging over their tranquil life in the land of Goshen. The children of Israel were heading toward a period of terrible slavery.

The Torah, with a carefully selected Hebrew word, alludes to the complex reality of life in the Goshen region of Egypt.

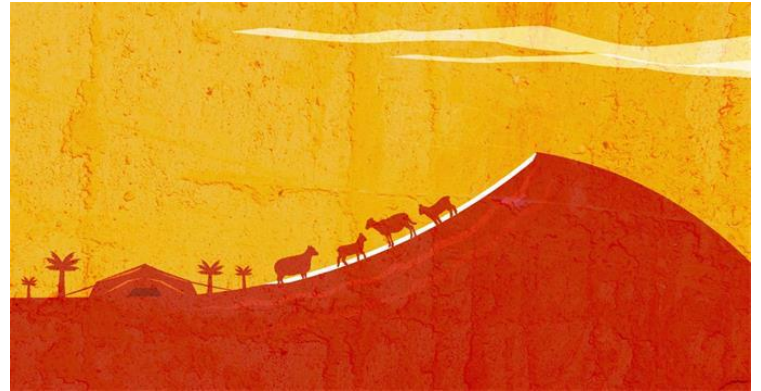
The final verse in this week's [Torah](#) portion describes the Jewish people thriving:

And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt in the land of Goshen, and they acquired property in it, and they were prolific and multiplied greatly.<sup>1</sup>

The Hebrew word for "acquired property" is "Va'ye'ah'chazu", which is from the word "Achuzah" which is commonly translated as estate. In our story the word is telling us that the Israelites acquired an estate in the land of Goshen. The word "Achuzah", however, has another meaning as well. It is from the root word "Achaz" which means to grasp. "Achuzah", can also mean that the land grasped the Israelites.<sup>2</sup> That in some way they were trapped by the land.

The word "Va'ye'ah'chazu", then, has different and opposing meanings. It can mean "acquiring an estate", which is a symbol of freedom, or it can mean being "grasped" by the land, which implies being trapped and enslaved.

The two meanings of the word "Achuzah" - "estate" and "grasped" - teach us an eternal message. It is a lesson about what our attitude toward Egypt should be, and what our general attitude toward the world we live in should be.



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When our soul descends into this world, it enters a foreign land. When we are exiled from Israel, we are in foreign territory. The purpose of the journey to this foreign territory is to “acquire an estate”. It is to find and to elevate the sparks of holiness which are in every material object and in every corner of the planet. We elevate the sparks by using physical objects for a meaningful purpose, thus infusing the world with holiness.

Wherever we find ourselves in the journey of life we are charged with transforming that place into an estate for holiness, an oasis of spirituality. G-d sends each of us to “exile” with a mission to find and elevate the thirsting sparks.

And yet, there is a danger in the journey. The danger is that instead of elevating the material, we are grasped by it. That instead of our possessions serving us, we serve our possessions. That instead of enjoying our estate, we are trapped by it.

**Instead of enjoying our estate, we are trapped by it**

The essence of exile, then, is “Achuzah”, grasped and trapped by the land.

Yet “Achuzah”, as in estate, also captures the essence of redemption and freedom.

We are all in the metaphorical land of Goshen. We may feel that we are enslaved by the lure of the material, that we are trapped by its grip. Yet, the Torah reminds us that we have the power to free ourselves from its gravitational pull. That the physicality which held us down yesterday can be redeemed and become the building blocks of a spiritual edifice, of an estate of holiness.<sup>3</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1. [Genesis 47:27](#).
2. The form of the word in this verse “אָחֻזָּה” means that they - the people - were grasped. If it would mean that they grasped the land then the word would be “אָחֻזָּה”.
3. Inspired by the teachings of the Rebbe, Likutei Sichot vol. 15 Sicha 4.

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