



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 15 | Vayigash | Sichah 4

## At Home in Egypt

---

Translated by Rabbi Mendel Blesofsky

**General Editor:** Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | **Editor:** Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

**Content Editor:** Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

© Copyright by Sichos In English 2023 ◦ 5784

A note on the translation: Rounded and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; curly brackets are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in curly brackets are those of the translator or editors and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Words in bold type are italicized in the original text.

Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation while maintaining readability. As in all translations, however, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

**Feedback is appreciated — please send comments to [info@projectlikkuteisichos.org](mailto:info@projectlikkuteisichos.org)**

## 1.

### TWO INTERPRETATIONS

There are two interpretations of the words “וַיִּאָחְזוּ בָהּ” {“they took hold in it”} (appearing in the last verse of our *parshah*<sup>1</sup> — “Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; “וַיִּאָחְזוּ בָהּ” and they were fruitful and multiplied greatly”):

- a) As Rashi explains, the word “וַיִּאָחְזוּ” interpreted according to the *pshat*<sup>2</sup> of the verse is “a term denoting possession”;<sup>3</sup>
- b) The interpretation of the **Midrash**:<sup>4</sup> “The land held them {“אֹחֲזוֹת בָּהֶם”} and grasped them... like a person held against his will” (meaning, the word “וַיִּאָחְזוּ” is a term denoting אֶחֱיִזָה — grasping).

[According to *pshat*, the interpretation {that “וַיִּאָחְזוּ” means} “a term denoting grasping” is **necessarily** untenable: The flow of the verse, “[Israel] settled... they took hold in it, and they were fruitful...” implies that the Torah uses the words “וַיִּאָחְזוּ בָהּ” to emphasize how they lived in the land of Goshen — that it brought them to the conditions in which “they were fruitful and multiplied greatly.” {As such,} according to *pshat*, we cannot understand the verse the way the Midrash understand it, that they lived in Goshen “against their will” (which would not have led them to be “fruitful...”). We also cannot interpret “וַיִּאָחְזוּ בָהּ” as a term denoting grasping {in the reverse direction} — that the Jewish people **took hold of it** (by dwelling there). If this were the case, it should have said וַיִּאָחֲזוּ {“*Vayochazu*”} with a *cholam* vowel on the letter א, and not וַיִּאָחְזוּ with a *kamatz* vowel, {“*Vayeiachazu*”}, {which means} that they were held by it].

---

<sup>1</sup> {*Bereishis* 47:27.}

<sup>2</sup> {The straightforward meaning of the verse.}

<sup>3</sup> Text of most editions of Rashi. In many editions (apparently erroneously, since there is no explanation how “grasping” is relevant here, unlike the **lengthy** explanation in the Midrash): “a term denoting grasping.” In the first and second editions of Rashi (and in many manuscripts ) this Rashi does not appear.

<sup>4</sup> *Midrash Tadshe* (ch.17).

As discussed numerous times,<sup>5</sup> when our Sages offer multiple interpretations of the same word (or subject), these interpretations are not **completely** at odds with each other. On the contrary, the fact they all interpret the **same** word suggests that the interpretations are interrelated.

However, the two interpretations mentioned above are seemingly (not only unrelated, but they are) mutually exclusive (in meaning): According to the verse's *pshat*, the clause “וַיֵּצְאוּ מִן־הָאָרֶץ” **emphasizes** that the Jewish people settled in Goshen in a manner that Goshen became **their** land, their “possession.” According to the Midrash, however, the emphasis is the opposite. The Jewish people were “held” in Egypt “against their will.”

## 2.

### THE LAND OF GOSHEN IN THE LAND OF EGYPT

This can be clarified by prefacing with an explanation of (the previous comment of) Rashi at the beginning of the verse, which introduces the idea that “they took hold in it.” Rashi quotes, “Israel settled in the land of Egypt” and explains: “And where? ‘In the land of Goshen,’ which is part of the land of Egypt.”

Commentators<sup>6</sup> explain that Rashi addresses the following question: The wording “in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen” implies they were two separate lands. Therefore, Rashi explains, “And where? ‘in the land of Goshen’”: It is as if the verse had said, “in the land of Egypt. And where {in Egypt}? in the land of Goshen.”

However, the following is unclear:

---

<sup>5</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 3, p. 782; vol. 15, p. 281; et al.

<sup>6</sup> *Gur Aryeh* and *Sifsei Chachamim* here; see Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi and *Devek Tov* for a slightly different approach.

- a) Why must Rashi add, “which is part of the land of Egypt”? It is self-understood from the flow: “Israel settled in the land of Egypt’ — **and where?** — ‘In the land of Goshen.’”
- b) A similar question can be asked on the verse itself: Why must Scripture say “in the land of **Egypt**” and then explain “in the land of **Goshen**”? The words “in the land of Goshen” are sufficient, for we **already** know that Goshen was in Egypt, as **earlier** in the *parshah*,<sup>7</sup> it explicitly states that Goshen was a part of Egypt.
- c) If Rashi only intended to explain the lengthy wording of the verse, “in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen,” why {in his caption} does he also quote the words “Israel settled”?

### 3.

#### FOREIGNERS

The explanation: Rashi intends to explain an apparent contradiction between this verse and a previous one: At the “Covenant between the Parts,”<sup>8</sup> Hashem told Avraham: “Your offspring will be foreigners in a land that is not their own... and afterward they shall leave...” Meaning, that before the Jewish people were able to enter the land of Israel, they would need to experience exile by being a “**foreigner** in a land that is not their own.” {As such,} how is it possible to say that while they were in Egypt, the Jewish people experienced exile when the verse describes that they **settled** there (“{Israel} settled” — meaning “a settler,” the **opposite** of “a foreigner”)?<sup>9</sup> Moreover {they settled} in the land of Goshen (which was, as mentioned in an earlier verse,<sup>10</sup> “the choicest of the land”) and in a manner (as the verse there concludes) in which “**they took hold** in it” — “a term denoting **possession**”: It became **their** settlement!

<sup>7</sup> *Bereishis* 47:6, 11 and Rashi’s commentary there.

<sup>8</sup> *Bereishis* 15:13-14.

<sup>9</sup> See Rashi on *Bereishis* 23:4.

<sup>10</sup> *Bereishis* 47:6, 11 and Rashi’s commentary there.

[This is why Rashi also cites the words “Israel settled” — for, as we said, the difficulty in the verse is how the Jewish people “settled” in the land of Goshen].

This difficulty is resolved by (the verse, as interpreted by) Rashi, who adds the words: (“in the land of Egypt” — ) “**which is part of the land of Egypt.**” Ultimately, the land of Goshen is also a part of Egypt<sup>11</sup> and **not** part of the land of Canaan. Therefore, having settled in Goshen, the Jews were still considered to be in exile. The very fact that they were not in the land of Canaan (**their “land”**) rendered them “**foreigners...** in a land “**that is not their own.**”

#### 4.

##### EXILE IN GOSHEN

However, all is not smooth (at least according to the inner dimension of the Torah): As known,<sup>12</sup> the Egyptian exile was intended to purify the Jewish people so that they would become worthy of receiving the Torah and entering Israel. How was this goal — (their purification) through exile and **servitude** in Egypt — realized by “settling” there?

This question becomes stronger based on the way the words “they took hold in it” are explained according to the *drush*<sup>13</sup> dimension of the Torah.

To preface:

The fact that the verse says, “*they took hold in it* — a term denoting **possession**” indicates that the land of Goshen was (and therefore, remains) a possession and inheritance of the Jewish people. At first glance, this interpretation is altogether perplexing: How is it possible to say that a portion of the land of Egypt is the possession and inheritance of the Jewish people? The

---

<sup>11</sup> Note Rashi’s commentary on *Bereishis* 12:19.

<sup>12</sup> *Torah Or*, 74a, et passim; et al.

<sup>13</sup> {*Drush* is an interpretive method of commentary in which the words of a verse are used as a platform to express an ostensibly extrinsic idea.}

land of Canaan is the inheritance of the Jewish people, as the verse states,<sup>14</sup> “to give you this land as an inheritance” — not the land of Egypt!

[This is not difficult on a *pshat* level since the sojourn in Goshen lasted (for the entire duration of the Egyptian exile —)<sup>15</sup> **210** years.<sup>16</sup> {Therefore,} the term “possession,” on a straightforward level, is appropriate. However, according to *drush*, which emphasizes the homiletic and deeper meaning {of the words of the verse}, this is still not smooth.]

In the book of *Yehoshua*,<sup>17</sup> the *Radak* cites a homiletic interpretation: The verse<sup>18</sup> stating that Yehoshua conquered “the entire land of Goshen” indeed refers to “Goshen of Egypt, and the Jewish cities of Israel had absorbed it.” (For this reason, Scripture<sup>19</sup> lists it among the cities belonging to the tribe of Yehudah.)

Accordingly, we can, seemingly, explain the expression “they took hold in it” (at least according to *Drush*): The fact that Goshen became an **inheritance** of the Jewish people was because it became “absorbed” within cities of Israel in Yehoshua’s time.

However, it is difficult to say this: It makes little sense to say that during the period described by the verse, “Israel settled...,” their settling in Goshen was already described as “possession” because **hundreds of years later**, the land of Goshen was absorbed (as a result of Yehoshua’s conquest,) within the cities of Israel.

The explanation: The Midrash<sup>20</sup> states that Pharaoh gave “the land of Goshen as a possession” to Sarah, and “therefore, the Jewish people settled in

---

<sup>14</sup> *Bereishis* 12:7.

<sup>15</sup> As is clear from *Shemos* 8:18; 9:26; 12:37.

<sup>16</sup> **Rashi’s** commentary on *Bereishis* 12:13; 42:2; *Shemos* 12:40.

<sup>17</sup> *Yehoshua* 11:16; see also *Rabosenu Baalei HaTosafos* on *Bereishis* 46:29.

<sup>18</sup> As well as earlier — *Yehoshua* 10:41.

<sup>19</sup> *Yehoshua* 15:51.

<sup>20</sup> *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*, ch. 26 (and see *Radal* there); *Midrash HaGadol* on *Bereishis* 46:34; 47:11 (explaining the verse “and he gave them **possession...**”); *Rabosenu Baalei HaTosafos* on *Bereishis* 46:29.

the land of Goshen, the possession of Sarah our Matriarch.” This indicates that the Jewish people received the land of Goshen **as an inheritance** (from Sarah).

However, on this basis, the difficulty becomes stronger: How did the Jewish people experience exile when living in Goshen if Goshen belonged to them as an inheritance, and consequently, they were not “foreigners... in a land that is not their own”?

## 5.

### TOILING IN TORAH

This will be clarified based on the explanation in *Torah Or*<sup>21</sup> that every detail of the labor in Egypt — “with hard labor with clay and with bricks...”<sup>22</sup> — is also found, in a spiritual sense, in the study of Torah. As the *Zohar* says:<sup>23</sup> “*With hard labor* {בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה} — this is a {Talmudic} difficulty {קוֹשְׁיָא}; *with clay* {בְּחֹמֶר} — this is a *kal vachomer*<sup>24</sup> {קַל וְחֹמֶר}; *and with bricks* {וּבִלְבָנִים} — this is the analysis of Jewish law {לִיבוֹן הַלְקָה}....” When a Jew toils in Torah study, this toil substitutes for the “hard labor...” of the Egyptian exile, exempting the person from the need to experience the toil physically.

[As the Mishnah says:<sup>25</sup> “Whoever accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah” — the emphasis here is “the **yoke** of Torah,” the hard labor, etc., as mentioned above, citing the *Zohar* — then “the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly concerns are removed from him.”]

We can similarly explain in our context: Even while living in Goshen, the Jewish people experienced (and attained the benefit of) the exile and servitude

---

<sup>21</sup> Beg. of *parshas Shemos*; *Or HaTorah*, *ibid.* (p. 8 ff.; vol. 7, p. 2475); et al.

<sup>22</sup> *Shemos* 1:14.

<sup>23</sup> *Zohar*, vol. 3, 153a.

<sup>24</sup> {Lit., “light and heavy,” *kal vachomer* is a Talmudic logical argument, whereby a strict ruling in a lenient case demands a similarly strict ruling in a more stringent case; alternatively, a lenient ruling in a stringent case demands a similarly lenient ruling in a lenient case.}

<sup>25</sup> *Avos* 3:5.

of Egypt through their toil in Torah study in the “house of study” that Yaacov and his sons established.<sup>26</sup>

This is also the allusion (according to “the wine of Torah”)<sup>27</sup> in Rashi’s explanation that “*they took hold in it* — a term denoting possession”: The first period of the Egyptian exile, when the Jewish people settled there (“Israel settled”), was not connected to physical hard labor, etc. On the contrary, at that time, they experienced that Goshen was “the choicest of the land,” and {it was understood} that they were there in their land. Everyone knew and recognized that the Jewish people were in **their** own land, where they could govern themselves. (They were not subjugated to the Egyptians.) The servitude of exile was expressed only through the strain of Torah study.

## 6.

### A LAND UNBEPFITTING FOR THEM

However, further clarification is required: Ultimately (according to the Midrash), the Jewish people **inherited** the land of Goshen from Sarah. Accordingly, how can this be considered an exile “in a land that is not their own”?

The explanation: Although Goshen belonged to the Jewish people as an inheritance from Sarah, it did not possess the same degree of holiness<sup>28</sup> as the land of **Israel**<sup>29</sup> — “a land that... the eyes of Hashem your L-rd are {always} upon it....”<sup>30</sup>

This was the exile “in a land that was not their own” while they were living in Goshen (even during the first period): The Jewish people were distressed by

---

<sup>26</sup> *Tanchumah, Bereishis Rabbah, Yalkut Shimoni*, and others on the verse (*Bereishis* 46:28), “and he sent Yehudah before him....”

<sup>27</sup> {The deeper teachings of Torah.}

<sup>28</sup> Even though the holiness of Goshen is somewhat comparable to the land of Israel — see *Alshich*, beginning of *parshas Vayechi*.

<sup>29</sup> See Rashi on *Bereishis* 26:2.

<sup>30</sup> *Devarim* 11:12.



their presence in a place that was not “a land that... the eyes of Hashem your L-rd are {always} upon it...” This is why it was considered “a land that was not their own” — {it was a place} devoid of the grandeur and holiness befitting them.” By undergoing this distress, the Jewish people fulfilled a part of the servitude and suffering entailed by the Egyptian exile.

## 7.

### DESCENT INTO SLAVERY

Although the exile of the Jewish people in Egypt began in a manner described as “they took hold in it,” as explained, nevertheless, this was a descent compared with their spiritual plane level while living in the land of Canaan. This descent enabled them to be subjected later to actual exile and servitude.

Put differently, when the first stage of exile concluded — after “Yoseph died, and all his brothers, and all of that generation”<sup>31</sup> — this precipitated a lapse in the Jewish people in their toil of Torah in the Torah academies established by Yaacov and his sons. The pain of living “in a land that was not their own”<sup>32</sup> began to fade from their memories. Consequently, the real Egyptian exile began.<sup>33</sup> In fact, it seemed “as if that day, they had entered Egypt”:<sup>34</sup> The Jewish people’s ownership of the land became forgotten, and they began to feel the bitterness of the suffering of exile.

Rashi emphasizes this in his commentary: “Israel settled in the land of Egypt’ — **And where?** ‘In the land of Goshen,’ **which is part of the land of Egypt**”: It is indeed true that in the beginning, the exile in Egypt was in the manner of “the land of Goshen” — {which was} the choicest of the land, etc. However, at the same time, we must know that it is “**part of the land of**

---

<sup>31</sup> *Shemos* 1:6.

<sup>32</sup> Note the *Kli Yakar* here.

<sup>33</sup> *Shemos Rabbah* 1:8; Rashi on *Shemos* 6:16.

<sup>34</sup> *Shemos Rabbah* 1:4 — and this occurred immediately after “Yosef died” (see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, p. 28 at length); Rashi on *Bereishis* 47:28: “When **our father Yaacov** passed away, {the eyes and heart} of the Jewish people were closed because of the misery of the slavery, for the Egyptians began to subjugate the Jews.” See the commentaries on Rashi there.

**Egypt**”: The very fact that the Jewish people had to settle in Goshen was a descent into Egypt. Moreover, “the land of Goshen” itself was transformed into the terrible Egyptian exile (“which is part of the land of Egypt”): When the “choicest of the land,” the land of Goshen, was not utilized for the service of Hashem, and on the contrary, the {fact that “Yeshurun} became fat” led to a situation where “they kicked {— rebelled}”<sup>35</sup> — consequently, it came to be, that within Goshen itself (where the Jewish people lived throughout the entire duration of exile, as mentioned above), the **concrete** Egyptian servitude materialized.

## 8.

### THE LIGHTS OF TOHU

The interpretation mentioned above (in Section 4) of the word יְרֵשׁוּ (a term denoting possession) — that the Jewish people **inherited** the land of Goshen — is also in line with the accomplishment of the Egyptian exile according to Torah’s inner dimension.

It is therefore also understood why — although according to the approach of **pshat**, the expression “possession” does not necessarily imply **inheritance** (that the Jewish people inherited the land of Goshen) — Rashi alludes to the concept of inheritance (by saying, “a term denoting possession”) in “the **wine** of Torah”<sup>36</sup> concealed within his commentary.

The explanation: The purpose of the Egyptian exile<sup>37</sup> was for the Jewish people to refine and seize the sparks of holiness found there. This is the deeper meaning of {the verse}, “They emptied Egypt.”<sup>38</sup> As our Sages explain,<sup>39</sup> “They made it like a trap in which there is no grain... like an abyss {in the sea} in which there are no fish.” The Jewish people refined and elevated the sparks of holiness

---

<sup>35</sup> *Devarim* 32:15; *Berachos* 32a.

<sup>36</sup> {The deeper teachings of Torah.}

<sup>37</sup> “The Jewish people were exiled only to gain converts” (*Pesachim* 87b; and see *Zohar*, vol. 1, 244a, and *Nitzozei Oros*, loc. cit.); this means to elevate the sparks, etc. (*Torah Or*, 6a; beg. of *parshas Lech Lecha*, 117b; et al.).

<sup>38</sup> *Shemos* 12:36.

<sup>39</sup> *Berachos* 9b.

{which originated} from the world of *Tohu*<sup>40</sup> that were found in the land of Egypt.<sup>41</sup>

Rashi alludes to this with {his comment}, “*נִשְׁאָרָיו בְּהָ* — a term denoting possession”: The purpose and goal of the fact that “the Jewish people settled in the land of Egypt” (the Egyptian exile) was so that in (and through) this exile, the Jewish people would *inherit* (the sparks of) the lights of *Tohu*. This acquisition would be consonant with the well-known saying of my father-in-law, the {Previous} Rebbe,<sup>42</sup> that for Gentiles, the order of inheritance adheres to the verse,<sup>43</sup> “{if a man dies} and has no sons... you shall give over his inheritance to his brothers.” And in the end, Eisav was Yaacov’s brother, as it says, “was not Eisav the brother of Yaacov?”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Yaacov’s descendants, the Jewish people, inherit {from the gentile nations, the spiritual descendants of Eisav,} the lights of *Tohu*.<sup>45</sup>

## 9.

### RASHI AND THE MIDRASH

Based on all of the above, we can understand the connection between the two interpretations of “*נִשְׁאָרָיו בְּהָ*”:

According to the *pshat* of the verse, *נִשְׁאָרָיו* is a term denoting possession — for based on a **straightforward** (and superficial) understanding, at the time of *parshas Vayigash*, the servitude of the Egyptian exile had not yet begun. On the contrary, at that time, it still appeared that Goshen was an **inheritance** of the Jewish people, as explained above.

---

<sup>40</sup> {*Tohu*, lit., “chaos,” is explained by *Kabbalah* thus: The world was initially in a spiritual condition called *Tohu* (chaos), an elevated realm of spiritual existence in which there was an over-abundance of Divine light, and a lack of vessels to contain this light. This former spiritual world, therefore, lacked the balance that characterizes our current world of *Tikkun* (rectified). *Tohu* collapsed in an event called “*sheviras ha’keilim*” – the “breaking of the vessels” when the light fell from the vessels containing the light. The sparks of holiness that “fell” when the vessels were broken were embedded within various parts of our world and await “correction” through mankind’s Divine service.}

<sup>41</sup> *Torah Or*, 56d; 60c; and see at length *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 3, p. 824 ff.

<sup>42</sup> *Maamar “Im Ruach HaMoshel”* 5695, ch. 6 (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, vol. 2, 362b).

<sup>43</sup> *Bamidbar* 27:8-9.

<sup>44</sup> *Malachi* 1:2.

<sup>45</sup> {See *Torah Or*, “*Vayishlach*,” 24a, that the spiritual source of Eisav was in the world of *Tohu*. Through the Jewish people’s Divine service in this world, the world of *Tikkun*, we rectify and elevate — “inherit” — the Divine sparks that fell from *Tohu*, the “domain” of Eisav. See *Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, *ibid.*, at length.}

However, according to the Midrash, which explains the homiletical and inner meaning of every subject,<sup>46</sup> וַיִּצְקוּ is a term denoting **grasping** — “the land held them and grasped them... like a person held against his will.” Since, in truth, settling in Goshen was a part of the descent to Egypt (“which is part of the land of Egypt”), and moreover, settling there facilitated the actual Egyptian slavery, as explained above. Therefore, the descent into Goshen was, on a **concealed** and deeper level, a manifestation of “the land **held** them and grasped them... like a person held against his will.”

The deeper purpose and reason that the idea of “וַיִּצְקוּ” was necessary, according to the Midrash (“the land held... them”) is alluded to in “the wine of Torah” contained in Rashi’s commentary: The purpose of their **forced** stay in Egyptian exile (as the Midrash explains) is emphasized in {Rashi’s words}, “a term denoting possession”: It was so that they would inherit “all the good contained within the sparks of *Tohu* that fell into Egypt by the ‘breaking of the vessels.’”<sup>47</sup> “And afterward, they will leave with great possessions.”<sup>48</sup>

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Vayigash* 5725 (1964)

---

<sup>46</sup> See the Alter Rebbe’s “*Hilchos Talmud Torah*,” sec. 2, par. 2; *Tanya*, “*Igeres Hakodesh*,” ch. 23.

<sup>47</sup> Wording from the *Maamar* “*Im Ruach HaMoshel*,” *ibid*.

<sup>48</sup> *Bereishis* 15:14.