

VAYIGASH (GENESIS 44:18-47:27)

This Land is Your Land? This Land is MY Land!

2025 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Jacob and his family were on their way to Egypt.

There was a famine and no source of food other than in Egypt. Jacob's long-lost son Joseph has been discovered to be the second in command of Egypt. The Pharaoh has invited Jacob to bring his family to Egypt as his guests. All of Egypt is available to Jacob and his family.

Jacob was wary. Egypt, with all its idols and all its immorality was not a great place for G-d-fearing Hebrews to raise their families.

Jacob sent Judah ahead to open up a Yeshiva in Goshen where the Children of Israel would be able to delve into Jewish values and insulate themselves from the negative influences of Egyptian society.

But would it work? Pharaoh was very interested in Joseph's brothers and their families. He met with some of the brothers and encouraged Joseph to recruit some of them to tend to the king's flocks. He saw Joseph's father Jacob as a great man, appreciated his blessings, and no doubt would have enjoyed having a holy man like him around.

But it wasn't to be. Joseph asked the king to allow his family to have their own community in Goshen. The king agreed, in part because Israelites raised and eat sheep, which were sacred to the Egyptians. As a result of this "abomination", the Israelites were an unwanted neighbor to typical Egyptians.

But what was with Goshen? What was so special about this place that it became the home of the Israelites in Egypt?

It goes back a few generations. Jacob wasn't the first person to go to Egypt to escape a famine. His grandfather Abraham (then known as Abram) had done the same.

But something awful happened to his wife Sarai.

When Abram came to Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful ... and the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house. (Genesis 12:14-15)

What a horrible event! The wife of this great and righteous prophet was taken to become a member of the Egyptian king's harem!

The king loved her! He adored her. He married her and showered her with gifts.

But he never touched her. An angel, under orders from Sarai, made sure of that. The Pharaoh released her.

Sarai was now a free woman. And a wealthy one.

Pirkei d'Rabi Eliezer writes: "Sarah was Pharaoh's wife. Due to his love for her, he wrote over to her in her Ketubah - marriage document - his silver, gold, servants and properties. And he wrote that the Land of Goshen was hers as an inheritance."

So Goshen was a "Jewish neighborhood" long before Jacob and his children got there!

What must have been going through the minds of Abram and Sarai when she was led away to the king's palace? What a tragedy!! How could this happen??!

In reality, this event laid the groundwork for our nation to maintain our identity and values while living in that wicked and spiritually defiled country.

And so it is in life. Sometimes we see difficulties and challenges, and wonder why G-d is allowing these things to happen. Sometimes the answer is that if we have the patience to wait we will see the miracles that G-d is planting, just waiting for the right time for them to blossom.

Have a great Shabbos.

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