

The Tur quotes from his brother R. Yehuda a tradition that the shalosh regalim, our three major pilgrimage festivals are modeled after our Avos, the patriarches. Pesach he says celebrates Avraham, Shevuos celebrates Yitzchak, and Sukkos celebrates Yaakov Avinu. What do these connections mean and what do they teach us? Specifically, what does Yaakov have to do with our being granted the holiday of Sukkos?

Indeed, the first time the word Sukkos is mentioned in the entire Torah is in reference to Yaakov. This is extremely significant in light of the famous teaching of the Vilna Gaon and Rav Tzadok Ha'Kohen of Lublin, that one can understand the entire essence of a subject by understanding its meaning in its first use in the Torah. To understand the holiday of sukkos then, we must fully understand and appreciate the relationship of Yaakov to the structures called sukkos.

After taking leave of his brother Esav, the pasuk says: "V'Yaakov nasa sukkosa, va'yiven lo bayis, u'lemikneihu asah sukkos, al kein kara sheim ha'makom sukkos." "And Yaakov journeyed to Sukkos and built himself a house and for his livestock he made shelters; he therefore called the name of the place Sukkos."

This pasuk is difficult to understand. Why would Yaakov name a place after the booths he made for his cattle, especially since he also built himself a house there? What is so significant about these booths that they warranted to have the city they were built in named after them, rather than it being named after the house that Yaakov built for himself and his family?

In order to fully appreciate this difficult pasuk, one must understand it in context. Yaakov journeyed to Sukkos immediately after the episode of his reunion with his older brother Esav. In fact at the end of that attempt at reconciliation Esav proposes that the two travel together. Yaakov objects and provides a politically correct and non insulting excuse. The Torah then describes how Esav started back toward Seir and Yaakov goes right away to Sukkos.

One gets the strong impression that something about Yaakov building booths called sukkos and naming a city after them is a response to Esav. What was it about their encounter that motivates Yaakov to build sukkos? What did Yaakov take away from their meeting that prompted him to construct Sukkos?

I am sure there are many possible answers to this question, but I would like to propose one to you today and share another tomorrow b'ezras Hashem.

Esav and Yaakov share the same DNA and genetic makeup and yet in personality and priorities they differ greatly. The Torah describes that Esav is a hunter, a man of the world, familiar with civilization's advancements and making use of the latest technology. Yaakov, on the other hand, is an introvert, an intellectual who spends his time confined by the four walls of the Beis Midrash.

What happened at their meeting, what did they talk about? The Tanna D'bei Eliyahu allows us to eavesdrop on their conversation that day.

... נטל עשו כחלקו העולם הזה, ויעקב נטל כחלקו העולם הבא. וכשבא יעקב מבית לבן, וראה עשו שיש ליעקב נשים ובנים ועבדים ושפחות ובהמות וכסף וזהב – מיד אמר עשו ליעקב: יעקב אחי, לא כך אמרת לי, שתטול אתה העולם הבא, ואני אטול העולם הזה? ומנין לך כל העולם הזה: נשים ובנים וממון, עבדים ושפחות? למה אתה משתמש ונהנה מן הדברים שבעולם הזה כמותי?! ואמר לו יעקב לעשו: זה מעט הרכוש, שנתן לי הקדוש-ברוך-הוא להשתמש בו לפי הצורך שלי בעולם הזה..

“When Yaakov came from the house of Lavan and Esav saw that Yaakov had wives, children, slaves, maidservants, animals, silver and gold immediately Esav said to Yaakov – ‘Yaakov, my brother, didn't you say to me that you would take your portion in the world to come and I will take mine in this world? Were did you accumulate these worldly possessions from, women, children money slaves and maidservants. Why do you occupy yourself with and enjoy these olam ha'zeh pleasures like me? Yaakov answered – these are the simple material goods God has given to me to use for my needs in this world.”

This conversation clearly had a big impact on Yaakov and influenced him greatly.

Yaakov Avinu is considered a symbol and model of the character trait of anivus – humility. Indeed, before meeting Esav in an attempt to reconcile, Yaakov feels great fear and anxiety. Despite his close relationship with Hashem, Yaakov feels doubt. In anticipation of the meeting he says to Hashem “Katonti mi'kol ha'chasadim”. “I have been diminished by all of the kindness that You have done for me.”

Yaakov consistently acts with humility, modesty and in an unassuming manner. Perhaps that is why Esav's rebuke of Yaakov touched him so

deeply and impacted him so strongly. Yaakov felt criticized for caring too much about physical and material wealth.

The conversation influenced him to the point that when he took leave of his brother he felt compelled to build sukkos and name the city not after his house but after the booths he constructed for his livestock. By creating the simple and plain structures of sukkos, Yaakov was expressing his perspective on the role of material wealth. By naming the city after the booths of his livestock instead of his own home Yaakov was making the statement that the size of one's home or material possessions contained therein, do not define him and do not represent him.

Ultimately, the purpose of all dwellings is to be a sukka, a simple structure to inhabit and dwell within. Yaakov doesn't live in a sukka, he lives in a bayis, but he names the city sukkos to declare that his house does not in any way define him.

Our sukkos and the holiday of sukkos serve the same purpose and express the same statement for us. At the root of the holiday of sukkos is the notion that we move from a diras keva to a diras arei. We leave our permanent, comfortable, decorated home with its sophisticated appliances and we spend a week in a simple, straightforward, unassuming, modest sukka. We do this not out of a sense of guilt that we have a diras keva a comfortable modern home the rest of the year, but to make the statement that even the other 357 days of the year that we inhabit our diras keva, we realize that even our diras keva is in truth a diras arei.

Rebbe Yaakov omeir: Ha'olam hazeh domeh l'prozdor bifnei olam ha'bah. This world is like a lobby before the world to come. Haskein atzmecha biprozdor k'dei she'tikaneis l'traklin. Prepare yourself in the lobby so that you can enter the banquet hall.

Someone once came to visit the Chofetz Chaim in his home and saw the incredibly simple lifestyle the Chofetz Chaim lived. The furniture was scarce and plain. He lived with the bare necessities and nothing more. The individual was so startled by his discovery that he almost rudely asked the Chafetz Chaim how could he live under such conditions? Why doesn't he invest in decorating his home? The Chafetz Chaim answered, tell me when you go stay in a hotel or an inn, do you decorate the room and begin rearranging the furniture in a way that you think looks best. No, replied the man. Why not asked the Chafetz Chaim? Because said the man I am only staying in the hotel for a short while. It is a temporary stay and I am only passing through. Exactly said the Chafetz Chaim, that is how I feel about my entire stay in this world, we are only passing through.

The holiday of sukkos reinforces for us the knowledge that this world is a lobby; it is a hallway that leads towards the final destination and we are only

passing through. We are not asked to live in sukkos the entire year nor is there an expectation that we live like the Chafetz Chaim. There is nothing wrong with building beautiful houses, decorating them so that they are attractive and using sophisticated equipment and appliances so they are functional. However, we still need to move out for 8 days of the year to acknowledge to ourselves that these houses aren't permanent. They aren't what is ultimately important and they do not define us.

No matter which development or association we live in, whether we have just knocked down a house or live in a small apartment, if our house is wired and networked or barely has indoor plumbing we all move out and inhabit sukkas that are relatively similar – simple, straightforward and plain.

It is no coincidence that sukkos takes place at the time of the harvest. In fact, many people think of sukkos as the Jewish harvest festival. After the anxiety of the planting and the growing, suffering through all the uncertainties that could affect the successful outcome when you finally have your produce successfully gathered and safely stored the Torah warns of the attitude you may have.

Kochi v'otzem yadi asu li es ha'chayil ha'zeh. It is my effort and my work that brought about this success and prosperity. The time of the harvest is when it is the easiest to stray and desert one's Maker.

Therefore, Sukkos comes as an exercise in humility. We leave our arrogance and our obsession with the material inside our homes and we relocate our bodies and souls for a week. We say goodbye to whatever influence Esav has on us and we leave it in our home, and we pull up a chair next to Yaakov in our sukka modeled after his sukka.

Sukkos truly does celebrate Yaakov Avinu and his commitment to humility and simplicity.

May we continue to enjoy our time in our diras arei, our temporary dwelling and when we return to our diras kevah may we be successful in viewing our whole house as a hallway and lobby.

Gut Yom Tov!