

HUTS FOR THE CATTLE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayishlach

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 307, The Difficult Childbirth. Good Shabbos!

The Significance of Making Huts For The Cattle

The Tur [Siman 417] writes in the laws of Rosh Chodesh [the new month] that the 3 pilgrimage festivals correspond to the patriarchs. Pesach corresponds to Avraham, as is alluded to by the pasuk [verse] "Knead and make rolls" [Bereishis 18:6]. (The Rabbinic tradition is that the Angels came to visit Avraham on the holiday of Pesach.) Shavuos corresponds to Yitzchak, because the shofar blast at the time of the giving of the Torah [Shemos 19:19] was with a shofar that came from the ram (that was sacrificed in place) of Yitzchak at the time of the Akeida. Finally, Succos corresponds to Yaakov, as it is written "...and for his cattle he made little huts (Succos), therefore they called the name of the place Succos" [Bereishis 33:17].

Rav Meir Bergman asks an obvious question in the book Shaarei Orah. We can understand that Pesach corresponds to Avraham, because he told Sarah to bake Matzos. That makes sense. The attribute of Avraham Avinu (our forefather Avraham) was Chessed (Kindness), and the act of preparing food and serving guests -- at a time when he was still recovering from the surgery of circumcision -- represented his attribute of kindness, his essence.

We can also understand that Shavuos corresponds to Yitzchak, because the Shofar of Har Sinai was from the ram of the Akeida. That too makes sense. Yitzchak represented the attribute of self-sacrifice (mesiras nefesh). That attribute is embodied in the ram that was a replacement for the sacrifice that Yitzchak was prepared to offer of himself. This fits in well with the theme of receiving the Torah (on Shavuous) for which we also need that same attribute of self-sacrifice. Therefore, both

these allusions make sense. However, in what way does making huts for his sheep embody the essence of Yaakov Avinu?

Rav Bergman has a beautiful interpretation of the Tur's comment. The Or HaChaim haKadosh asks the following question on the above quoted pasuk: Does it make sense that they named the place "Succos" just because Yaakov made little huts there for his cattle? Was that such a significant activity that for time immemorial the place should be known by the name Succos? The Or HaChaim answers that Yaakov did something revolutionary for his cattle, with Succos, that no one had ever done before in the history of the world. Yaakov was the first person to build shelters for his animals. To commemorate this precedent-setting action, the location was forever more given the name Succos.

However, the answer of the Or HaChaim still begs for further explanation. The explanation is as follows: Next week's parsha contains the incident of Yosef being tempted by Potiphar's wife. Our Sages tell us that when Yosef was about to commit the act of adultery with this temptress, he thought to himself, "How can I do this? Your husband was so nice to me -- he gave me a job, he gave me a place to live -- how can I be so ungrateful by committing this treacherous act?"

What prompted Yosef to have these "second thoughts"? At that moment, the image of his father Yaakov appeared to him in the window. This stopped him from proceeding with the sin. What does this mean?

The meaning is that Yaakov gave over to his son Yosef the appreciation of the attribute of Hakaros HaTov [recognizing when someone is owed a debt of gratitude]. Our Sages learn from the fact that Yaakov sent Yosef (as we will learn in next week's parsha) telling him, "Please go check on... the welfare of the sheep..." [Bereishis 37:14] that a person is obligated to investigate after the welfare of things from which he derives benefit. In other words, a person must even have HaKaras HaTov towards his sheep.

If one earns his living by raising sheep, the attribute of HaKaras HaTov demands that you show appreciation to those animals. They are responsible for your livelihood. Yaakov Avinu's attribute of HaKaras HaTov was so extensive that he told Yosef to investigate the welfare of the sheep.

Clearly then, HaKaras HaTov is not for the sake of the person who did the favor - it is for the sake of the beneficiary. I must show appreciation. Therefore, it does not matter if I benefited from a stone or a sheep or the Nile River. In Judaism, anything that gives me pleasure, sustenance, or shelter is something to which I must show my appreciation.

This was the Torah of Yaakov our Patriarch. The request for Yosef to check on the sheep was a lesson that would stay with him for the rest of his life. Do not be an ingrate. Recognize favors that are done for you. Therefore, when Yosef faced the ultimate test of sinning with his master's wife, it was that image, representing the moral lessons of Yaakov his father that appeared to him from the window.

The image of Yaakov was not warning him about the severity of the sin of adultery. It was warning him about the severity of the sin of ingratitude. That is what stopped Yosef.

Now we know the meaning of the Or HaChaim. The city is called Succos because Yaakov was the first person in history to make huts for his animals. What was so significant about that? Now we understand. The recognition that "my sheep should not be out there in the rain and in the snow and in the heat because my sheep take care of me, so I must take care of my sheep" was the attribute of Yaakov Avinu. This is not a matter of a good investment -- that perhaps the sheep will get fatter, enabling them to be sold for a higher price. It is a matter of "I owe a debt of gratitude even to a sheep".

The significance of Yaakov's innovation warranted calling the place by the name Succos.

Now we also understand the Tur. We celebrate the Festival of Succos because the patriarch Yaakov made Succos. Yaakov taught us about HaKaras HaTov - even toward animals, certainly towards man, and even more so towards G-d. As such, every year, when we sit in our Succos, we are fulfilling the Torah of the patriarch Yaakov. We say thank you to G-d for taking us out of Egypt and sustaining us in the desert for those forty years. "Thank you" - that is what Succos is all about.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

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