

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME SUCCOS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayishlach

The Significance of the Name Succos

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #571, Bowing To a Person. Good Shabbos!

The verse says, *"Then Yaakov went to Succos and built himself a house, and for his livestock he made shelters (Succos), therefore he called the name of the place Succos"* [Bereishis 33:17]. Many commentaries question the need for the Torah to say that Yaakov called the name of the place Succos, after the huts he made for his animals. This would seem to be a rather insignificant detail and, in fact, an insignificant reason to name the place Succos. This is hardly on par with naming a place "Beth El" [the House of G-d] to commemorate Yaakov's encounter with the Almighty for all generations.

The Chida on Parshas Vayishlach quotes an answer that originally appears in the Or HaChaim's commentary on Torah. They both suggest that Yaakov named the location Succos because what he did there was revolutionary. This was the first time in the history of mankind that anyone constructed shelters for their animals. People had been grazing cattle since time immemorial, but this was the first time that anyone thought it was important to protect their animals from the elements -- the heat, the cold, the wind, and the rain. Yaakov taught us that not only must one have compassion for human beings, one must have compassion for animals as well.

Like many things in life, this can be carried to an extreme, as we unfortunately find today. Today's society sometimes goes to the opposite extreme of being more concerned with the protection of animals than with the protection of human beings. However, the basic idea that it is appropriate to have mercy on animals is a proper one. Yaakov wanted to establish this idea for mankind, and he did that by naming the place after his act of building Succos [huts] for his livestock.

This fits in well with the pasuk in next week's parsha, when Yaakov sends Yosef to visit his brothers.

Yaakov tells Yosef: *"Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock"* [Bereishis 37:14]. Chazal state that a person must show appreciation towards his animals. Animals provide sustenance for their owners; therefore the owners must take care of them as well. The first person to teach us this idea was Yaakov Avinu.

Sending A Delegate From the Previous Generation

This week's parsha records the death of Rivka's nursemaid, Devorah: *"Devorah, the wet nurse of Rebecca died and she was buried below Beth-El, below the Allon, and he named it, Allon-bachuth"* [Bereishis 35:8]. Rashi wonders what Rivka's nanny was doing in Yaakov's household, such that Yaakov should wind up burying her. The Medrash states that Devorah was 133 years old at the time of her death. Rashi states that Rivka had sent her old nursemaid to Yaakov in fulfillment of her promise to him that she would send word to him when it was time to come home from Padan Aram [Bereishis 27:45]. Devorah died on the journey back home after having carried out this mission.

Rashi's words are very difficult to comprehend. Why would Rivka choose this elderly woman to journey on this long trip to carry out such a mission? Could she not find a more appropriate messenger to send word to her son that it was time to come home?

Rav Dov Weinberger makes a beautiful comment on this Rashi. Yaakov was most reluctant to leave the house of Yitzchak and Rivka. Rivka insisted that he must leave. But Yaakov protested: "What will be with my spirituality? How can I leave this holy household and survive in the house of Lavan the crook?" Rivka promised "I will take you back and I will restore to you what you lost spiritually in the years you were away."

To accomplish such a mission, one cannot send a young kid. On such a mission, one must send a "great grandmother." To restore the idea of what the House of Yitzchak was like in Yaakov's mind, it was necessary to send someone from the older generation. The person who grew up in yesteryear presents an untarnished image. They come from the "old home." Unlike the "younger generation," they represent "the way it is supposed to be."

Many times we will meet a person, not from our generation and not even from the generation of our parents, but someone from two generations ago. It is sometimes worthwhile just to observe how an old Jew acts. He witnessed what things were like "when times were spiritually correct."

Those old enough to remember Rav Ruderman saw a connection to the glory of what European Jewry was in its prime. He corresponded with the Ohr Sameach. He saw the Chofetz Chaim. He sat on Reb Chaim Soloveitchik's lap. He took walks with Reb Chaim Ozer. His reactions were Torah reactions. He knew instinctively what Yiddishkeit [Judaism] was all about.

When Rivka wanted to spiritually retrieve Yaakov from the house of Lavan, she had no choice but to send a delegate who represented the previous generation.

The Chofetz Chaim lived to be a very old man. He died when he was 93 years old. At the end of his

life, he wanted to travel to Eretz Yisrael and spend the last days of his life in the Holy Land. He wanted to study the laws of Kodshim and the Temple Sacrifice there. As a Kohen, he hoped he would merit to witness the coming of Moshiach and to participate in the Divine Service in the rebuilt Beis HaMikdash.

He felt that he was an old frail man and could not contribute much more to European Jewry and therefore wanted to "retire" to the Holy Land. He took counsel with Rav Chaim Ozer, the (much younger) leader of European Jewry at the time. Rav Chaim Ozer advised him not to leave Europe. He told him "Even if you cannot be in the Yeshiva any more and you cannot give Torah lectures any more and even if you cannot write any more because of your age -- still, if you remain, people will be able to see what a Jew is supposed to look like."

This can be compared to children sitting at their parents' table. Many times they misbehave. But when their grandpa (Opa/Zeida/Saba) is sitting at the table, the behavior is different. When a member of the previous generation is there, a bit of awe and respect is present as well.

This was Rav Chaim Ozer's message to the Chofetz Chaim, and this explains Rivka's choice of messenger to retrieve her son Yaakov back from Padan Aram.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayishlach are provided below:

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- Tape # 075 - Tombstones
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