



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ה סוכות

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

The Tur (written by R. Jacob ben Asher 1269-1343) notes in the name of his brother that the three festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, correspond to our three forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov: Passover corresponds to Avraham because the angels came to visit him on Pesach. (Avraham tells his wife Sarah to make “cakes” for the guests, which our Sages teach us were matzahs.) Shavuot corresponds to Yitzchak, because the shofar blown on Mount Sinai when the Torah was given, came from the ram that was brought as a sacrifice instead of Yitzchak. Sukkot corresponds to Yaakov because the Torah says that Yaakov made *sukkot*, huts, for his cattle.

The connections between Avraham and Pesach and Yitzchak and Shavuot are clear. But what do the huts (*Sukkot*) that Yaakov made for his cattle have to do with the holiday of Sukkot? Did he perhaps make these huts *on* Sukkot? There is no basis for that.

To answer this question, we need to understand more about Yaakov and his relationship with his brother, Esav.

The Midrash teaches us.

תנא דבי אליהו זוטא - פרק יט

אמרו רבותינו בעוד כשהיו יעקב ועשו במעי אמן אמר יעקב לעשו: עשו אחי, שני אחים אנחנו לאבינו ושני עולמות יש לפנינו - העולם הזה והעולם הבא. העולם הזה יש בו אכילה ושתיה ומשא מתן ולשאת אשה ולהוליד בנים ובנות. אבל העולם הבא אינו כן בכל המדות הללו. ואם הוא רצונך טול אתה העוה"ז ואני אטול העוה"ב. ומנין שכך הוא שנאמר (בראשית בה) ויאמר יעקב מכרה כיום את בכורתך לי כשם שהיינו אומרים בבטן. באותה שעה נטל עשו בחלקו העוה"ז ויעקב נטל בחלקו העוה"ב.

Our Sages taught. When Yaakov and Esav were still in utero Yaakov said to Esav, Esav my brother, we are two brothers to our father, and there are two different worlds to be had – This world and the world to come. This world has eating, drinking, business, women to marry and children to be had. But the world to come has none of the above. If you wish, why don't you take this world and I will take the world to come... Esav

then decided to take this world as his portion, and Yaakov took the world to come.

We see that very early on, Yaakov and Esav, who were so different in temperament from each other, came to an agreement on how they would live in peace together: Esav chose this world, and Yaakov chose the world to come. Esav was interested in this world's pleasures and had no interest in spirituality. Yaakov, on the other hand, was interested in the world to come and would use this world only as a tool to earn his place in the world to come. (Tana Devei Eliyahu Zuta 19)

When Yaakov tricked his father Yitzchak into giving him the blessings instead of Esav, Esav vowed to kill Yaakov. Yaakov fled to his uncle Lavan, and, after 22 years, Hashem told Yaakov that it was time to leave Lavan's house. When Yaakov sent scouts to get a fix on his avowed enemy, Esav, they reported that Esav was on his way with 400 warriors to kill him. The two camps were on course to meet the next day.

Yaakov had a three-part plan: He (1) sent Esav an extensive bribe of 550 animals of different types, (2) prayed to Hashem, and then (3) prepared for a physical encounter by splitting his camp into two. If one was hit, the other would survive.

That night, Yaakov crossed back over the river to retrieve a few minor articles that he had left behind. There, he met Esav's angel who wrestled with him and tried to kill him. Although he was unable to overcome Yaakov, ***he did manage to injure Yaakov's hip.***

Why did Esav's angel attack Yaakov for trying to retrieve a few insignificant items? Our Sages explain that it was because it seemed to the angel, that Yaakov was obsessed with material wealth. Why else would he return to retrieve a few worthless items? Hence, because it seemed that Yaakov had changed his role and made wealth and

possessions his purpose in life, Esav had an issue with him. That wasn't the original deal! Yaakov needed to eschew pursuing wealth just for the sake of having wealth. Esav's angel attacked Yaakov thinking that he could discredit him. The angel, however, got it all wrong. Yaakov remained completely true to his identity even when he returned to retrieve a few insignificant items. A righteous person sees all his possessions as tools for service to Hashem and does not allow himself to squander or waste *any* of his resources. He recognizes that they are all given to him for a purpose.

As an aside, there is deep significance to the injury the angel inflicted on Yaakov.

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan 1839 – 1933) explains that just as the thigh supports the body, Yaakov's thigh symbolizes the supporters of Torah. Yaakov, the embodiment of the Torah, symbolizes the Torah. Hence, the injury to Yaakov's thigh symbolizes that Esav can influence wealthy people who are able to support Torah study. Such people, learning from Esav, see their wealth as an end unto itself, and therefore do not give of that wealth to the support of Torah. This is where the angel of Esav has made his mark. This is why Torah institutions are always desperate for funds to keep their doors open.

The next day, the two of them actually met. The above midrash continues...

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 העוה"ב ואני אטול העוה"ז ומנין לך כל העוה"ז נשים ובנים וממון עבדים ושפחות. למה אתה משתמש ונהנה מן הדברים שבעוה"ז כמותי?: ואמר לו יעקב לעשו זה מעט הרכוש שנתן לי הקב"ה להשתמש בו לפי הצורך שלי בעוה"ז שנאמר (שם לג) וישא את עיניו וירא את הנשים ואת הילדים ויאמר מי אלה לך ויאמר הילדים אשר חנן אלהים את עבדך.

When Yaakov came from Lavan's house, and Esav saw Yaakov's wives and children, servants, cattle, gold and silver he immediately asked Yaakov, "Yaakov my brother, didn't you tell me that you were going to take the world to come, and I would get this world? If so, what is all this material wealth you have? Wives, children, money, slaves and maidservants? Why do you own and enjoy the same worldly goods that I do? Yaakov answered, "This is the modest amount of worldly goods that Hashem has given me to use to serve Him!"

Yaakov explained, "I do not need these things for myself! I use them strictly to serve Hashem! These are the tools that Hashem has given me to use to fulfill my service to Him!"

Rabbi Judah the Prince, a descendant of Yaakov, was so wealthy that, even in those days, he had even the rarest fruits and vegetables on his table all year round.

The Talmud (Ketubot 104b) reports:

בשעת פטירתו של רבי זקף עשר אצבעותיו כלפי מעלה אמר רבונו של עולם גלוי וידוע לפניך שיגעתי בעשר אצבעותי בתורה ולא נהניתי אפילו באצבע קטנה
When he was on his deathbed, he extended his ten fingers heavenward and proclaimed, "Master of the Universe, it is known and revealed to You that I toiled in Torah with my ten fingers, but I never took any pleasure for myself, even my pinky's worth."

Even though Rabbi Judah the Prince had enormous wealth, he did not use it for himself. Rather, he used it only as a tool for service to Hashem.

Before he died, Rabbi Judah could testify about himself that he never derived personal pleasure from his wealth. Holy people can have every pleasure available to them, and still use them only as a tool to serve Hashem.

Esav then asked Yaakov about the gift that Yaakov had sent.
(Genesis 33:8-11)

(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לָךְ כָּל הַמַּחֲנֶה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר פָּגַשְׁתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַצָּא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אָדֹנָי:

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו יֵשׁ לִי רַב אַחִי יְהִי לְךָ אֲשֶׁר לְךָ:
 (י) וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֵל נָא אִם נָא מְצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְלִקְחֹתָ מִנִּחְתִּי מִיָּדַי כִּי עַל כֵּן רָאִיתִי
 כָּפְנֶיךָ כְּרֹאת פְּנֵי אֱלֹקִים וַתִּרְצֵנִי:
 (יא) קַח נָא אֶת בְּרִכְתִּי אֲשֶׁר הִבָּאת לְךָ כִּי חֲנַנִּי אֱלֹקִים וְכִי יֵשׁ לִי כָל וַיִּפְצַר בּוֹ וַיִּקַּח:

8. Esav asked, "What did you intend by that whole camp that I met?"
 Yaakov answered, "To gain favor in my lord's eyes."
 9. Esav said, "**I have plenty.** My brother, let what you have remain yours."
 10. But Jacob said, "No, I beg of you! If I have now found favor in your eyes, then accept my tribute, inasmuch as I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of a Divine being, and you were appeased by me.
 11. Please accept my gift that was brought to you, inasmuch as G-d has been gracious to me and inasmuch as **I have everything.**" Yaakov urged Esav, and he accepted:

Notice the difference between Esav's and Yaakov's attitudes towards physical possessions. Esav says, "I have plenty," implying, but, I could always use more. In a world that measures success by monetary wealth, there is no limit to how much a person can have; the more the better. Yaakov, however, exclaims "I have everything." I don't collect possessions for the sake of having a lot of stuff to call my own. My possessions are tools that I use to serve Hashem. Therefore, whatever I have is exactly what I am supposed to have. I have everything I need to fulfill my purpose in the world.

Our Sages bring this point out in a different place in the Torah. (Deuteronomy 25:15-17)

(טו) אָבֹן שְׁלֵמָה וְצֹדֵק יְהִיֶּה לְךָ אִיפֹה שְׁלֵמָה וְצֹדֵק יְהִיֶּה לְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרִיכוּ יְמֵיךָ עַל
 הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר יְדוֹד אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ:
 (טז) כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת יְדוֹד אֱלֹקֶיךָ כָּל עֲשֵׂה אֵלֶּה כָּל עֲשֵׂה עוֹל:
 (יז) זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֶק בְּדַרְךָ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

15. You should have a perfect and honest weight and a perfect and honest measure, so that your days shall be lengthened on the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you:

16. All who do [not do] this, all who act corruptly, are abomination to Hashem, your God:

17. Remember what Amalek did to you when you were leaving Egypt.

Our Sages query the proximity of Amalek to the commandments to have honest weights and measures. They answer that if a person uses dishonest weights and measures, Amalek, a descendant of Esav, will pounce on him to punish him. A Jew who cheats in his business dealings displays the dogma of Esav, that monetary wealth is the most important thing despite the laws of the Torah.

Jews have a different perspective than the rest of the Christian world.

Esav says, “We exist for this world; to sample and enjoy all the pleasures that it has to offer. To this end, we must amass as much wealth as possible so that we can always afford those pleasures.”

Yaakov, on the other hand, says, “We are in this world as a passageway to the next world. Wealth is a precious tool, which when properly used can earn us a special place in the world to come.” But, as we learned from Yaakov, we must use it wisely and not waste or squander it on frivolous things. There are unlimited expenditure options, but we need to use careful discretion to choose those causes that will further Hashem’s agenda. Wealth’s purpose is to allow us to earn a higher place in the world to come.

As Jews, we are the descendants of Yaakov. But what is the source for saying that the Christian world descends from Esav?

Many verses in the Torah say that say Esav is Edom (Christianity).

The Midrash tells us that the Jewish people will have to go through four exiles, the fourth one being Edom.

They are alluded to in the second verse in Genesis.

ספר בראשית פרק א

(ב) וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבֵהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹקִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:

2. *When the earth was astonishingly empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters.*

The Midrash on this verse says: (Midrash Rabba Genesis 2:4)

(ד) ר"ש בן לקיש פתר קריא בגליות והארץ היתה תהו זה גלות בבל שנאמר (ירמיה ד) ראיתי את הארץ והנה תהו ובהו זה גלות מדי (אסתר ו) ויבהילו להביא את המן וחושך זה גלות יון שהחשיכה עיניהם של ישראל בגזירותיהן שהיתה אומרת להם כתבו על קרן השור שאין לכם חלק באלהי ישראל על פני תהום זה גלות ממלכת הרשעה שאין להם חקר כמו התהום מה התהום הזה אין לו חקר אף הרשעים כן ורוח אלהים מרחפת זה רוחו של מלך המשיח

The first of the four exiles listed is Babylonia, under the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the first Holy Temple. Then came the Medes and the story of Purim. Next came the Greeks and the story of Chanukah.

The fourth exile is *Edom*, the Roman Empire. King Titus, Emperor of the Roman Empire, destroyed the Second Holy Temple, and we are still in exile from that event. Thus, we are considered in the Exile of Edom-Rome - the Roman Catholic Church, which is the last vestige of the Roman Empire. All flavors of Christianity in the world today come under the umbrella of the Roman Catholic Church. The Midrash continues: the end of the fourth exile will be the coming of Mashiach whose arrival we anticipate every day.

Because our world situation today is a carry-over from our forefather Yaakov and Esav, those events are especially significant to us. Often, we can understand current events by seeing them in the light of the wisdom shared with us by the Torah long ago.

Additionally, the Yaakov -- Esav interactions so many years ago are actually prophetic. Our Sages teach us that those interactions set a template for the future for all time. Yaakov's challenges from Esav would repeatedly challenge Yaakov's children throughout the many years that they would be under Esav's dominion. To secure a successful outcome, we must follow the path that Yaakov, in his great wisdom and foresight, chose. We understand that this is the only correct path to take.

This is the message of the Sukkah. A Sukkah is a temporary dwelling and we are commanded to live in it for a week. This is to teach us that this world is really just a temporary dwelling. After going through Yom Kippur when we fasted and prayed all day in Shul like an angel, we are in a position to absorb this important message.

As descendants of Yaakov, our purpose in this world is earn a place in the world to come. This world is like a Sukkah, a temporary dwelling, as we are all just passing through. We all enter this world expecting to leave it one day. When Sukkot comes we don't invest a lot of money in the Sukkah, since we can manage without all the conveniences and luxuries of our homes for seven days. Similarly, we should not invest in this world as if it is our permanent station in life.

Another way to look at it is: This world is like a rental property. If you had \$10,000 to invest, would you put it into the house you are renting or into your permanent residence? This is the lesson that we learn from Yaakov who made temporary dwellings for his cattle. This was to show that his possessions were secondary; the tools that Hashem gave him to earn his place in the world to come.

A wealthy American businessman was travelling through Europe and made a point of visiting the most important and holy Jew of the time, the Chofetz Chaim. When the businessman entered the Chafetz Chaim's simple unfurnished home, he was flabbergasted. Here he was in the home of the greatest Jew of that time, and all that he has is a table, a few chairs, and a few beds?

The visitor couldn't hold back his wonder and asked the holy rabbi, "Rabbi, where is all your furniture?"

"And where is yours?" Asked the rabbi.

The guest replied, "Rabbi, I am just travelling through, so I don't need it."

"I am also just travelling through," Answered the Chofetz Chaim.