



Our Sukkot Lesson from Ya'akov Avinu

Ya'akov Avinu's greatness lay in the fact that he managed to maintain his spiritual stability even in the midst of constant life crises. His brother was out to kill him, he fled to the wily Lavan and despite his uncle's trickery and deceit, Ya'akov still remained faithful to the *mitzvot* and upright and pure in his ways.

Even Ya'akov's two names say something of his mental strength in the face of his difficult life. *יעקב* is related to *עקב*, heel – the curved area at the base of the leg. *עקב* can also mean a cause of. Ya'akov's other name, *ישראל*, contains the Hebrew word *ישר*, straight. Despite his many struggles with forces more numerous or powerful than he, Ya'akov's integrity, sense of right, and loyalty to G-d remained intact.

Israel, the aspiration to uprightness, purity, and truth – is the ideal name. Ya'akov, the necessity to face evil and cruel reality in our world – is the actual name. The tension between the real and the ideal accompanies *Am Yisrael's* long and complicated history, yet we are known by our ideal name.

This teaches us that despite everything we have been through – the persecutions, the pogroms and the murders, the battle for good and truth has not been lost. On the contrary. Our core values became stronger and more prominent. The wandering Jew, even when walking through the valley of the shadow of death, did not fear the evil forces attempting to forcibly convert and confuse him. The more they tortured us, the more we grew.

Am Yisrael has been through its fair share of ups and downs. Yet whenever we were in trouble, wherever we were, our eternal values remained firm and unshaken. This remarkable ability – to be stable while everything around you is unstable – is the hidden power of Ya'akov Avinu. And indeed, in this sense, he has never died. As we continue to live our lives based on Jewish principles and values, he lives on too.

“Esav returned along the way to Seir on that day. Ya'akov went to Sukkot” (Bereishit 33). The Zohar expounds upon the juxtaposition of these two journeys, likening them to the relationship between Yom Kippur, when the scapegoat is sent to Azazel, and the Jewish people moving into their *sukkot*. After Ya'akov, the idealist, freed himself from the influence of Esav, the materialist, he was able to relax in the shade of truth and faith in his *sukkah*. The *sukkah* is the antithesis of aggressiveness, dominance and evil. Its physicality is purely functional – a vessel for holding Jewish law, faith and deep spiritual joy.

Sukkot actually contains a double message. On the one hand, our temporary, often flimsy *sukkah* symbolizes transience and impermanence – the exile. Yet it is also a holy sanctuary within the ups and downs of regular life, a little Israel among the other nations.

There is no contradiction between the two. Even in exile, in unimaginable conditions, we continued to develop our culture and strengthen our spirit.

This double message carries far-reaching implications. In our times, mass media has exposed our homes to the

world outside and the winds of that world blow strongly in all corners of our homes and communities.

So much so that the Jewish home is no longer as stable as it once was. Its foundations are wobbling and for many, it is no longer a safe fortress. Nevertheless, if the home is still identified as a Jewish one, it is likely to remain that way forever, whatever the challenges. In such a home, the spirit of the individuals, the family, and the nation must be reinforced, nurtured and developed.

Our nation possesses such inner strength to combat and overcome life's challenges because we inherited this trait from Ya'akov Avinu. He taught us that we can overcome temptations, avoid danger and stay strong, whatever the circumstances.

Am Yisrael, the ideal people, has the power to filter things and to absorb only the good, the true and the beautiful, while discarding falsity, ugliness and evil. Even if our *sukkah* appears to be unstable on the outside, there is nothing more stable than the spirit within.

Rabbi Ya'akov Ariel was the Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan, Israel, and one of the leading rabbis of the Religious Zionist movement.