YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat CHayei Sara**

**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

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This shiur is dedicated in memory of

Alexander Sender Dishkin z"l

whose yahrzeit falls on the twenty-third of Cheshvan,

by his great-granddaughter, Vivian Singer.

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**“And to My Family”**

Summarized by Yair Oster

Translated by David Strauss

And my master made me swear, saying: You shall not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell. But you shall go to my father's house, and to my family, and take a wife for my son. (*Bereishit* 24:37-38)

Eliezer speaks of Avraham's only requirement regarding the bride that would be selected for his son Yitzchak. Not wealth, not beauty and not even an upstanding character – the only thing that was important to Avraham was family. From here, as from many other stories, we learn about the value of family in Judaism.

Many studies have shown that, statistically, the lives of children born to all kinds of special families are more difficult in numerous ways. Judaism has always believed in the importance of the natural family structure, and today it seems that this is proving itself to be true. Even within Judaism one can find different approaches regarding the importance of the family, and it seems that our yeshiva belongs to the stream that emphasizes how important the family is. This emphasis is reflected in the educational approach of the yeshiva, which perceives itself as a second stage in the educational process that the student received at home, in context of his family, and not as an attempt to educate him in an entirely new way.

The Western culture in which we live misleads us into thinking that we are as powerful as God, that we are capable of running our lives any way that we wish. The prophet Yechezkel comes out strongly against such a perception:

Son of man, say to the prince of Tzor: Thus says the Lord God: Because your heart is lifted up, and you have said: I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the heart of the seas; yet you are man, and not God, though you did set your heart as the heart of God. (*Yechezkel* 28:2)

Many try to argue that just as we can control the hours of light and darkness without being dependent on nature, so can we, in their view, control human identity – redefining the concept of gender and other concepts without any dependence on nature.

But although this approach stems in part from our technological advances, it is also rooted in Western culture’s emphasis on rights, rather than duties. One of the chief representatives of this current of thought was the philosopher John Locke, who discussed the liberties and the rights of the individual. But Judaism believes not only in the individual and his rights, but also in his obligations. When we rejoice at a wedding, it is not because of the ancillary rights that marriage adds, but rather because of the responsibility that it entails on both sides, as reflected in the *ketuba*, which is a promissory note on the part of the husband, and in the wife's oral obligations to her husband. Even a mother's love for her child does not stem from privileges that she enjoys following childbirth, but rather from the additional obligations that she has towards him. Indeed, it is not at all clear that those who get married nowadays are well enough prepared for married life; most are not aware of the fact that marital life is mostly a matter of obligations, rather than rights.

Another major factor in the approach we are bemoaning is the hedonism and pursuit of pleasure that is so rampant in the Western world. According to Judaism, one must enter under the yoke despite the difficulty, and not just enjoy this world.

We must fight against those perceptions that seek to abolish family values, as they challenge our very existence as Jews.

(This *sicha* was delivered at *seuda shelishit* on Shabbat *Parashat Chayei Sara*, 5777 [2016].)