YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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

**Parashat toldot**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

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In loving memory of my parents

Shmuel Binyamin (Samuel) and Esther Rivka (Elizabeth) Lowinger z"l

- Benzion Lowinger

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Dedicated in memory of Szore Rivka (Agnes) Reiter-Kitay z"l,
whose yahrzeit will be on the 6th of Kislev.

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**“You Will Give Truth to Yaakov”**

Summarized by Daniel Herman

Translated by David Strauss

Already at the beginning of the *parasha*, during Rivka's pregnancy with Yaakov and Esav, Rashi points out the differences between these two characters:

"A cunning hunter" – understanding how to entrap and deceive his father with his mouth. He would ask him: “How should salt and straw be tithed?” Consequently, his father thought him to be very punctilious in observing the *mitzvot.*

"A man of the field" – in its plain sense: a man without regular occupation, hunting beasts and birds with his bow.

"A plain man" – not expert in all these things; as was his heart was his mouth. One who is not ingenious in deceiving people is called "plain, simple."

Esav is described as a deceitful and strong-handed man, whereas Yaakov is portrayed as a straight and honest man, whose inner and outer worlds are one and the same. Indeed, Scripture itself describes Yaakov as a man of truth, as the verse states: "You will give truth to Yaakov and mercy to Avraham" (*Mikha* 7:20).

However, the plain sense of the verses challenges the connection between Yaakov and truth – beginning with his acquisition of the birthright through his exploitation of Esav's fatigue and hunger after a difficult day in the field, through his stealing of the blessings that his father Yitzchak had intended to give Esav, and ending with his manipulations regarding the flocks of Lavan his father-in-law, despite the fact that the latter had acted dishonestly with him when he changed his wages ten times.

It seems that in order to understand the verses and the *derashot* of *Chazal* that associate the attribute of truth with Yaakov, we must consider the attribute of truth itself. What truth are we talking about? Yaakov is perceived as the patriarch who mediates between the two patriarchs who preceded him, between the kindness (*chesed*)of Avraham and the discipline (*gevura*) of Yitzchak.

Avraham represents the attribute of kindness; his desire to pass on of his own also to Yishmael the son of the maidservant, which is reinforced by *Chazal's midrash* regarding the *Akeida*, testifies to this quality:

R. Yochanan said: "And He said, Take your son" – which son? "Your only son" – this one is an only son to his mother, and that one is an only son to his mother. "Whom you love" – this one I love, and that one I love. He said to him: "Yitzchak." (*Bereishit Rabba* [ed. Theodor-Albeck], *Parashat Lekh-Lekha*, 39)

Similarly, Avraham's desire to bring all of humanity close to God demonstrates his concern for every individual in the world.

Yitzchak, on the other hand, is perceived as a man of inner strength and discipline, if only for his uncompromising attitude toward the delegation of the king of Gerar and the difficult things that he said to them when they tried to reach a peace agreement with him.

The attribute of Yaakov is *tiferet*, beauty, the attribute that stands between the attributes of kindness anddiscipline. The same is true about his quality of truth. We are dealing here not with absolute and transcendental truth, but rather with existential truth that is connected to reality.

When we examine the story of Yaakov's purchase of the birthright, we can see how this is applied. The common discourse in our day – the discourse concerning rights – is not the important discourse in Judaism. Every right comes at the top of a list of obligations, which are the main thing. This is true about the birthright as well. It is true that the firstborn is entitled to a double share of inheritance, but this does not come to him for free. The eldest son is not only the first among equals among his brothers, but also the one who is designated to continue in place of his father and serve as leader of his house after him.

When Yaakov sees his brother go out into the field and cast behind his back all the values that he had received from his house, as is evident from his marriages with the daughter of Canaan to the displeasure of his father and mother and against Avraham's explicit directive in the previous *parasha*, he understands that Esav is no longer the firstborn. In contrast, it is Yaakov himself who stays in his house, arranges it, and sees to all its needs. From that moment he decides to actualize the truth that is happening around him and he buys the birthright. The birthright passes from the hands of the son who was born first into the hands of the de facto firstborn.

As descendants of the patriarchal lineage, which begins with Avraham, passes through Yitzchak and ends with Yaakov, we are commanded to stand firm on our principles, but also to keep our fingers on the pulse, being aware of current trends and happenings, and knowing how to properly respond to them. Yaakov's existential truth must light the way on our journey through life.

(This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Toldot,* 5777 [2016].)