YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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

**Parashat Vayeshev**

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Dedicated in memory of Israel Koschitzky z"l,
whose yahrzeit falls on the 19th of Kislev.
May the world-wide dissemination of Torah through the VBM
be a fitting tribute to a man
whose lifetime achievements exemplified the love of
Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael.

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Dedicated in memory of my father,
Hillel ben Yechiel (Herman) Reiter, of Debrecen, Hungary,
whose yahrzeit falls on the 24th day of Kislev.
May his soul be among the Righteous in Gan Eden

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In loving memory of my parents:
Shmuel Binyamin (Samuel) and Esther Rivka (Elizabeth) Lowinger z”l

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"**These Are The Generations of Yaakov”**

**Sicha of Rav Baruch Gigi**

Summarized by Aviad Brestal

Translated by David Strauss

In the book of *Bereishit*, we find various lists of generations, e.g., the generations of Adam, the generations of Noach, and the generations of Shem, Yishmael, Yitzchak, and Esav. Our *parasha* opens with the generations of Yaakov:

And Yaakov dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Yaakov… (*Bereishit* 37:1-2)

However, instead of listing Yaakov's descendants, as was done in the previous registers of names, the Torah records the story of the sale of Yosef and its consequences. In addition, in the middle of the story of the sale of Yosef, it describes Yehuda's marriage and the birth of his sons. Only later, in *Parashat Vayigash*, do we find a list of the descendants of Yaakov.

The reason for this unusual structure seems to be related to previous events. Both Avraham and Yitzchak selected an heir from among their sons who would continue their legacy, while the other sons were rejected. This is what happened to Yishmael, to the sons of Ketura, and to Esav. About Yaakov, on the other hand, *Chazal* say that his "bed was perfect" – that is, all twelve of his sons continued in his path and none of them were rejected. However, *Chazal's* assertion regarding Yaakov's “perfect bed” was not at all obvious to the parties themselves. From this moment and until the time that Yaakov lies on his deathbed, a struggle rages over the identity of Yaakov's generations and their status.

Our *parasha* and the ones that follow describe the shaping of Yaakov's family, which is comprised of twelve tribes. Throughout the process, two major struggles are evident: the struggle between the sons of Leah and the sons of Rachel over the leadership, and the struggle between Leah's first four sons over the leadership among themselves.

These struggles were not only about the leadership, as it might seem at first glance; they also touched upon the basic question of the identity of the successors of the house of Yaakov, and as such, who would be rejected from the family. We, of course, know that in the end Yaakov merited that his bed was perfect, but along the way this was not at all clear. Thus, at the time of the sale of Yosef, his brothers think not only that they have deposed him from the leadership, but that they have removed him from the family.

Beyond the struggle over the leadership and the very inclusion in the house of Yaakov, a complementary course occurs in which each brother finds his place among the brothers. Allusions to this can be found in the names given to Yaakov's sons, and references to this can be found afterwards in the blessings given to the brothers. We will illustrate this with several of Leah's sons.

The rationale for the name given to Leah's firstborn, Reuven, is described as follows:

And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuven; for she said: “Because the Lord has looked upon [*ra'a*] my affliction; for now my husband will love me.” (*Bereishit* 20:32)

Reuven was so named because Leah had hoped and wished that he would finally bring Yaakov to love her. Indeed, later in his life Reuven works to achieve Yaakov's love for his mother, both in the incident involving the mandrakes and in the incident involving Bilha. For this reason, Yaakov does not bless him and holds those incidents against him until his final days:

Unstable as water, have not you the excellency; because you went up to your father's bed; then defiled you it – he went up to my couch. (*Bereishit* 49:4)

Shimon is given that name for the following reason:

And she conceived again and bore a son, and said: “Because the Lord has heard [*shama*] that I am hated, He has therefore given me this son also.” And she called his name Shimon. (*Bereishit* 29:33)

Shimon represents the hatred that Leah felt was directed at her and her despair regarding her situation. She no longer tries to attain Yaakov's love; rather, she wants her son to bear her silent cry. Later as well, Shimon is involved in hate-related events: He and Levi kill the people of Shechem, and according to a midrash of *Chazal* that is based on very clear allusions in Scripture, it was Shimon who proposed killing Yosef. Yaakov's blessing of Shimon completes the picture, seeing that it was not really a blessing at all:

Shimon and Levi are brethren; weapons of violence their kinship. Let my soul not come into their council; to their assembly let my glory not be united; for in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they houghed oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Yaakov, and scatter them in Israel. (*Bereishit* 49:5-7)

Levi is the exception and belongs less to this process.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Leah's fourth son is Yehuda, whose birth is described as follows:

And she conceived again and bore a son; and she said: “This time will I praise [*odeh*] the Lord.” Therefore she called his name Yehuda; and she left off bearing. (*Bereishit* 29:35)

Here the explanation is different from the previous explanations. Whereas the earlier explanations expressed various aspirations or feelings of bitterness, Yehuda already expresses a kind of coming to terms and full gratitude to God: "This time I will praise the Lord." Indeed, later in his life, Yehuda saves Yosef and confesses to Tamar, and at the height of his penitential process he stands firm before Yosef and defends Binyamin like a lion.

Because of his assumption of responsibility, Yehuda was the first to receive a true blessing and, in addition, the leadership:

Yehuda, you shall your brethren praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Yehuda is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you are gone up. He stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as a lioness; who shall rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Yehuda, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, as long as men come to Shilo; and to him shall the obedience of the peoples be. (*Bereishit* 49:8-10)

For Yehuda prevailed above his brethren, and of him came he that is the prince; but the birthright was Yosef's. (I Divrei Ha-Yamim 5:2)

We see that these processes, by way of which each brother found his place in the family fabric, are of a dual nature.

On the one hand, as stated above, our *parasha* and those following it describe the chain of events that began with the sale of Yosef. These events are openly conducted without outside intervention or a directing hand, and the characters operate in an entirely human-earthly manner.

However, from time to time there are hints that the human plane is not the entire picture. There is another plane – that of Divine providence. Though these events might appear to be a random collection of occurrences, in hindsight it is absolutely clear that God secretly arranged that Yaakov's family would take shape in the manner most appropriate to it, even if it did not appear so openly.

 This situation, as we have shown, is already hinted at in the names that were given to Yaakov's son, and in the end, Yaakov relates to it in his blessings. The house of Yaakov develops in seemingly twisted ways, but in retrospect, the meaning of the events is clear. In the words of the *midrash*:

R. Shemuel bar Nachman opened: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, [says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope"] (*Yirmeyahu* 29:11). The tribes were occupied with the sale of Yosef, and Yaakov was occupied with his sackcloth and fasting, and Yehuda was occupied with taking a wife, while the Holy One, blessed be He, was creating the light of the messianic king. (*Bereishit Rabba*, *Vayeshev* 85)

The generations of Yaakov, then, is not just about genetics. The generations of Yaakov includes internal confrontation with issues of leadership and the place that each tribe will find for himself, with success depending on deeds and leadership, giving direction and assuming responsibility.

God, however, is the ultimate cause of all that happens. Just as He sits and creates the light of the *Mashiach*, so too He arranges that each of the brothers will find his proper place, in accordance with the name that his mother gave him at birth and in accordance with the blessing that his father gave him before he died.

So too, Matityahu and his sons in their time did not yield to the spirit of their time. They led a process of calling in the name of God, thereby meriting to shape the image of the Jewish people for all generations.

We, too, as the successors of the sons of Yaakov and the Chashmonaim, must remember that alongside our efforts, there is Divine providence that accompanies the history of the Jewish People. At the same time, we must not weaken our human efforts and action to build the people of Israel, to continue to move forward, and to shape the image of Israel for future generations.

(This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *parashat Vayeshev* 5778 (2017).)

1. About Levi it is stated: "And she conceived again and bore a son; and said: “Now this time will my husband be joined [*yilaveh*]to me, because I have borne him three sons.” Therefore his name was called [lit. *he* called his name] Levi" (*Bereishit* 29:34). Levi was called by that name because of Leah's hope that Yaakov would be joined to her and relate to her. Here it says that "he" called his name Levi, and not "she" called, as with the previous sons. It is possible that the reference is to Yaakov, who agreed with Leah's reasoning. *Chazal* expound that Levi was named by the angel Gavriel. In any event, it is clear that Levi's naming was unique and connected to external intervention. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)