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 Baruch gigi**

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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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**“She Is Your Companion, and the Wife of Your Covenant”**

Summarized by David Oren, and edited by Aviad Brestel

Translated by David Strauss

**Marriage and Kiddushin**

Our *parasha* describes the search undertaken by Avraham’s servant to find a wife for Yitzchak, which ends with the latter's marriage to Rivka. This account offers us an opportunity to explore the marital connection between a man and a woman.

Let us preface our remarks with the Rambam's description, at the beginning of *Hilkhot Ishut*,of the difference between marriage prior to the giving of the Torah and marriage after the giving of the Torah. The Rambam presents us with two models that are fundamentally different from each other:

Before the Torah was given, when a man would meet a woman in the marketplace and he and she decided to marry, he would bring her home, conduct relations in private, and thus make her his wife. Once the Torah was given, the Jews were commanded that when a man desires to marry a woman, he must acquire her as a wife in the presence of witnesses. [Only] after this does she become his wife. As it is stated: "When a man takes a wife and has relations with her" (*Devarim* 22:13). (*Hilkhot Ishut* 1:1)

Before the Torah was given, when a man would meet a woman in the marketplace, and he and she desired, he could give her payment, engage in relations with her wherever they desired, and then depart. Such a woman is referred to as a harlot [*kedeisha*]. When the Torah was given, [relations with] a harlot became forbidden, as it is stated: "There shall not be a harlot among the children of Israel" (*Devarim* 23:18). (*Hilkhot Ishut* 1:4)

The two differences noted by the Rambam point to the same principle. Before the giving of the Torah, and still today among the descendants of Noach, marriage was predicated on the free will of the man and the woman – purely on the desire of the couple. If "he and she decided" on a permanent relationship, i.e., marriage, then "he would bring her home"; alternatively, if "he and she desired" a one-time connection, he would "engage in relations with her wherever they desired."

When the Torah was given, the rules changed so that the desires of the man and the woman are no longer the sole factors; indeed, there are situations in which their desires cannot be fulfilled. If they want a one-time connection, this is absolutely forbidden; even when they seek marriage, they require a formal ceremony in the presence of witnesses. The essential point in these changes is that from the time the Torah was given, the relationship is no longer a private matter of the couple, but is a function of a national mission and mitzva of building a family in Israel, as part of the development of the nation. Therefore, witnesses must be present, and for the same reason, a blessing is recited to emphasize that the event expresses the sanctity of Israel – i.e., the betrothal blessing that concludes with "who sanctifies His people Israel by way of *chuppa* and *kiddushin*," or, according to the Rambam's version, "who sanctifies Israel."

This blessing emphasizes the fact that we are dealing with a mitzva, which the couple accepts upon themselves when they bond together, to fulfill the mission and destiny of building the house of Israel, as the will of God who commanded us to do so. There is no more room for a one-time affair, in which God has no interest and which is wholly focused on the personal pleasure of the couple. Since the Torah was given, marital life has been defined exclusively as part of the building of the nation.

These fundamental ideas also appear in the words of the prophet Malakhi, when he cries out about a severe blow to marital life:

Yet you say: Why? Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion, and the wife of your covenant. (*Malakhi* 2:14)

The prophet emphasizes two elements: one, "your companion," and the other, "the wife of your covenant." In simple terms, "your companion" refers to the friendship and companionship between husband and wife, which is the foundation of their connection. To this, the prophet adds "the wife of your covenant," that is, the joint covenant. When a man marries a woman, they enter into a covenant to establish together the house of Israel, and this covenant entails joint responsibility and commitment to the building of that house.

In essence, "between him and her" is a matter of mere desire, while the covenant involves mutual commitment. This, indeed, is the meaning of the blessing "who created everything for His glory" (*she-ha-kol bara li-khevodo*) in the marriage blessings. Rashi in *Ketubot* writes that this blessing is not actually a marriage blessing, but is recited in honor of the people who have gathered for the ceremony. According to the above perspective, this blessing expresses to the assembled audience that the celebration of the marriage is not only a celebration of the loving partners. It is also, and perhaps primarily, a celebration of the people of Israel and of God, who gladdens the groom and the bride, as they enter into a covenant to continue the building of the nation – for all is created for His glory.

**The Choosing of Rivka**

Let us go back to the *parasha* and examine the process of choosing a wife for Yitzchak and the marriage of Yitzchak and Rivka. In the *parasha*, when Avraham's servant is sent to Charan to bring back a wife for Yitzchak, he is bound by two restrictions that make the task especially complicated: The first limitation is, "You shall not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell" (*Bereishit* 24:3); the second is, "Beware that you not bring my son back there" (*Bereishit* 24:6). The only way to balance the two restrictions is to bring a woman back from Charan. Why does Avraham do this?

As for the second restriction, it seems that even though the Gemara permits a man to leave Eretz Israel in order to marry, that is true only for an ordinary individual. Yitzchak, however, is not an ordinary individual, but rather one who was supposed to build the "house of Avraham"; he therefore could not leave the land, because the building of God's people must be done in God's land, the land of the covenant (as is clear in *Bereishit* 17). Thus, since Yitzchak is the one who will transform Avraham the man into the house of Avraham, by succeeding him in the next generation, his connection to the land of Israel is critical.

As for the other restriction, one may ask: What wrong did Avraham see in the people of Canaan?

The answer to this question lies in the root of the people of Canaan, the son of Cham, whom Noach cursed: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers" (*Bereishit* 9:25). As the Midrash describes the conversation between the servant and Avraham: "He said to him: You are cursed and my son is blessed, and one who is cursed must not cleave to one who is blessed" (*Bereishit Rabba Chayei Sara* 59). The descendants of Cham are cursed, and they are lecherous, as the Torah emphasizes in the section dealing with forbidden sexual relationships: "After the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and after the doings of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, you shall not do" (*Vayikra* 18:3).

Therefore, Avraham is not willing to have his offspring join with the Canaanites, so he sends his servant to Charan. According to the plain meaning of the text, the servant did not have to bring a woman specifically from the family of Avraham. (That would certainly be a plus, but was not a necessary condition). What was important was that he find a woman who descended from the blessed Shem.

The servant did not content himself with that, but added a special test for the woman who would build the house of Israel, one who could integrate into the great vision of "for I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice" (*Bereishit* 18:19).

This test was a test of lovingkindness. The task of calling upon the name of God cannot be confined to "the king's daughter within"; she must shine her goodness and kindness upon all those around her. Indeed, when Yitzchak brought Rivka "into the tent" (*Bereishit* 18:6), blessing once again rested on the dough so that it satisfied the needs of those who came to eat, a cloud once again hung over the tent, and the candle that illuminated the entire area once again remained lit from one Friday to the next.

There is a somewhat disturbing phenomenon nowadays, in that when people come to choose a life partner, they sometimes focus on their personal desires, on the element of "your companion" that the prophet Malakhi emphasized, and fail to attach sufficient and central importance to the "wife of your covenant." There is nothing wrong with seeking "your companion" – that is, of course, appropriate and expected, but it is clear that one should not be content with just that. The woman a man seeks should also be a partner in the vision and covenant of building a home. A covenantal partnership cannot ignore the fundamental values of serving God and building a home centered on Torah and *mitzvot*; the two spouses must be connected by a shared spiritual vision.

A pleasant and friendly woman is not enough, and a pleasant and friendly man is not enough. Marriage requires partners to a covenant, committed and aware of their responsibility to build the house of Israel that will continue the house of Avraham, who walked in the path of God and practiced justice and righteousness in the land. The mission is twofold: "your companion" and "the wife of your covenant."

This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Chayei Sara* 5780.