YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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

**PARSHAT VAYETZE**

**guest Sicha by rAV Nechemya Raanan**

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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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**“Surely the Lord is in This Place”**

Adapted by Aviad Brestel

Translated by David Strauss

**“Had I Known, I Would Not Have Slept”**

*Parashat Vayetze* opens with Yaakov's dream, and states immediately afterward:

And Yaakov woke up from his sleep, and he said: Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. (*Bereishit* 28:16)

In other words, Yaakov wakes up from his dream, and says to himself in astonishment: "Wow, there is God! I didn't know there was God in this place!'

What is so "awesome" (*Bereishit* 28:17) about God being in this place? Rashi quotes the following in the name of *Chazal*:

"And I knew it not" – for had I known it, I would not have slept in such a holy place as this. (Rashi, *Bereishit* 28:16)

On the face of it, Rashi's meaning is simple: Had Yaakov known that "the Lord is in this place," he would not have gone to sleep there. It would be inappropriate to sleep there because sleeping in a holy place dishonors and belittles it.

But Rashi's words can be understood in another way as well. In the book *Ish Tzadik Haya*, written by Simcha Raz about Rabbi Aryeh Levin, it is related that once during the week of *Parashat* *Vayetze*, a man came to the Etz Chaim Talmud Torah and shared the following with the students: Yaakov’s regret was not because his sleeping there belittled the place, but because he had missed out on the place's potential: "Why did I sleep? I should have taken advantage of such a holy place! It's a shame that I wasted time sleeping in such a holy and special place, which I should have exploited in full consciousness – with study, prayer, and doing something significant.''

Simcha Raz continues: Following this, Rabbi Aryeh Levin stood up and told the Etz Chaim students as follows: Sometimes, people leave the yeshiva after a period of studying there and suddenly look back on the time they studied in the yeshiva, and remember the mood, the atmosphere, the nobility of the yeshiva, and say to themselves: "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew not, for had I known, I would not have slept!" Had I sufficiently cherished and valued the fact that "the Lord is in this place," perhaps I would have used my time better. Rabbi Aryeh Levin added: "I am telling you this now. Surely the Lord is in this place. Know this already now. Take this into consideration, and use your time well."

**“The Gate of Heaven”**

 It seems to me that Rabbi Aryeh Levine's understanding of Rashi is really a much broader and more comprehensive statement regarding our lives in general.

 The message of the dream of the ladder (or at least one of the messages that arises from the dream) is the connection between heaven and earth, between the upper and the lower worlds, which finds expression in the fact that the "angels of God are ascending and descending on it" (*Bereishit* 28:12).

What does this mean? Yaakov is afraid and anxious about his journey from Be'er Sheva towards Charan. He worries that now, God forbid, he may abandon everything: he is leaving his father's house, and he is afraid that he may no longer be part of the story of the house of Avraham, that the promise may no longer be relevant to him. When Yaakov sets out for Charan, this is the fear that gnaws at him.

We know this is his fear because of what God promises him in the dream of the ladder. He says to him: "And, behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back into this land" (*Bereishit* 28:15), that is to say: Don't think now, when you are walking, when you are fleeing, that God is "god of the land," because this is not right, for God is found everywhere! Perhaps this is the point that *Chazal* alluded to when they spoke of the ascent of the angels of the land of Israel and the descent of the angels from abroad (as quoted by Rashi, *ad loc*.). God comes and says to Yaakov that He is found everywhere: "Behold, I am with you" (*Bereishit* 28:15), and we see that "and, behold, the Lord stood beside him" (*Bereishit* 28:13); God stands on the ladder, both among those ascending and among those descending. This is what God promises Yaakov: God oversees, watches over, and is there, and thus He will return Yaakov to the land and fulfill all the promises He made to him.

Yaakov understands the message, and says that "this is the house of God and this is the gate of heaven" (*Bereishit* 28:17). There is a gate to heaven. There is a gate through which God oversees, and through which God directs things in the world. That is where the prayers go up, and from that spot, there is also an appeal to man.

That is why this message is revealed specifically to Yaakov: Because Yaakov reveals this truth in all of his endeavors. His life is filled with struggles, and we see time after time that Yaakov knows how to contend with people, even with Lavan the Aramean: wherever he goes, he reveals the name of God.

After Yaakov receives and internalizes this message, and after he erects a pillar in that place, he understands that there is in fact a "house of God" (*Bereishit* 28:17) – there is a point of connection between heaven and earth – and there is a "gate of heaven" (ibid.) – there is a point of contact and communication between the upper and lower worlds.

**So What About Actual Life?**

In this point, in this message that Yaakov learns – and applies and realizes in his life – there is also a message for all of us: "Surely the Lord is in this place!” It is true that the "place" referred to in the original text is Mount Moria, the site of the Temple – but from "this place," Divine providence and inspiration spread to the whole of reality, to each and every thing, and therefore we should all remember that "the Lord is in this place" throughout life.

Sometimes we are so busy with the small things of life, with the intensity of life, with the pursuit of all the needs and constraints of life, that we may forget that after everything is said and done, "the Lord is in this place." God reveals Himself in everything – in our families, in friends, in landscapes, in this good and holy land, and, of course, in Torah study and in prayer.

I hope we will not regret one day when we look back and only then notice that God is there – instead of living His presence, instead of doing meaningful and positive things with it; I hope we will not regret that we were asleep at that time. May we always remember that "the Lord is in this place" – in each and every place.

(This *sicha* was delivered as part of the "*Chiddush mei-ha-Gush*" video series for *Parashat Vayetze* 5779.)