YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**Parashat VAYESHEV**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch Gigi**

**"Junior Students Must Not Be Pushed Aside By Senior Students"**

Summarized by David Oren

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

*Parashat Vayeshev*, along with other *parashot*, tells the story of Yaakov's family with all its crises and tribulations: the evil report of the brothers that Yosef brought to his father, the sale of Yosef by his brothers, Yehuda's descent from his brothers, and more.

This immediately raises the following question: Wouldn't it be better if the House of Israel were established by a peaceful and "perfect" family, totally preoccupied with the building of the nation of Israel?

**The Family's Maturation**

To answer this question, we will briefly examine the events that take place in these *parashot*, and the development within the sons of Yaakov. At the outset, it should be remembered that *Chazal* criticize Yaakov: "A man should never single out one son among his other sons, for on account of the two-*sela* weight of silk, which Yaakov gave Yosef in excess of his other sons, his brothers became jealous of him and the matter resulted in our forefathers' descent into Egypt" (*Shabbat* 10b). That is to say, Yosef's multi-colored coat made him feel more important than the rest of his brothers, which led him to bring his brothers' evil report to their father, which ultimately caused him to be sold to Egypt. In other words, this entire sequence of events resulted from Yosef's adolescent behavior, which was unfortunately encouraged by his differentiated treatment.

Of course, this does not mean the brothers were completely innocent, and it was not without reason that they feared Yosef's reaction at the end of *Parashat Vayechi*: "It may be that Yosef will hate us, and will fully requite us all the evil which we did to him" (*Bereishit* 50:15). But this complicated relationship between Yosef and his brothers came to an end when Yosef explained that he did not loathe his brothers. On the contrary, he declared: "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (*Bereishit* 50:20). Here Yosef revealed his acquisition of the opposite trait – namely, maturity – which led him to refrain from hurting his brothers in revenge, and even to acknowledge the good (and unexpected) results of his having been sold.

At the very same time that Yosef was sold, Yehuda went down from his brothers, and the story of Tamar took place. Yehuda was put to a great test: he could easily have pretended nothing happened between him and Tamar, and surely, he, and not Tamar, would have been believed. But Yehuda, out of the greatness of his personality, chose to admit what he had done: "And Yehuda acknowledged them, and said: She is more righteous than I" (*Bereishit* 38:26). Yehuda’s development brought him to the point that he recognized his mistake and Tamar's righteousness – and even admitted it in public. It is not for naught that, based on his confession, Yehuda merited that David, king of Israel, issued from him.

We further see that the brothers all regretted the sale of Yosef, or as they put it: "We are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he pleaded before us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us" (*Bereishit* 42:21). The brothers, too, went through a process of development and internalized their mistake. They grew up.

It seems that we now have an answer to our question, because the maturation processes that occurred within Yaakov's family teach us an important lesson. Had the family been perfect, as I suggested earlier might seem would have been preferable, we would have thought that there are two models of families: the perfect family, and the "problematic" family. The perfect family can create great things; it can establish the House of Israel – while the ''problematic" family will always remain so, and has nothing to aspire to.

This, however, is not the case, because everyone and every family can improve. Indeed, it is precisely through the challenges they face that Yaakov's family grows, and from this we learn a general lesson – that every family can grow and improve.

This lesson stands out even at the end of Yaakov's life. When he fears that perhaps, like the children of Avraham and of Yitzchak, his children are not all committed to his legacy, his sons say to him: "Hear Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one; just as there is only One in your heart, so is there only One in our hearts" (*Pesachim* 56.). *Do not worry, Father. Admittedly, our family has gone through upheavals, crises and challenges – but we don't have to be like Avraham and Yitzchak, from whom issued disqualified sons*. As the Midrash formulates this idea: "'With all the powders of the merchant' (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 3:6) – this is Yaakov our father, whose bed was unflawed and no disqualification was found among them" (*Shir Ha-Shirim Rabba*, 3).

**The Controversy Over Whom to Accept as a Student**

The idea of having confidence in the potential for improvement relates to a dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai that Rabbeinu Yona brings, according to his version of *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*:

Beit Shammai say: One should only teach a student who is fit, modest, proper, and God-fearing, as it is stated: "All darkness is laid up for his treasures" (*Iyov* 20:26).

Beit Hillel say: One should teach everyone. A hundred – to produce ten good students; ten – to produce two; and two, “because you know not which shall prosper, whether this one or that one, or whether they both shall be equally good” [see *Kohelet* 11:6]. (*Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, according to the reading found in Rabbeinu Yona's commentary to *Avot* 1:1, s.v. *ve-ha'amidu talmidim harbeh*).

Beit Shammai say: Resources are limited, and you can't teach everyone. It is preferable to teach only those with high initial scores. Others will certainly not succeed, and it is simply a waste of time to teach them. This was also the position of Rabban Gamliel, who established that only one “whose inner character corresponds to his exterior” should be admitted to the *beit midrash* (*Berakhot* 28a).

In contrast, Beit Hillel believe that every person has potential. Even a person whose starting data is not so good can become the leading authority of the next generation. Even the most inferior student can become the one who will uphold the Oral Law – like Hillel's own most junior student, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai:

And so it happened that Hillel gathered all his disciples and said to them: My disciples, are you all here? They said: Yes. One of his disciples said to him: They are all here except for the most junior among them. He said to them: Let the junior one come, for in the future, the generation will be led by him. And they brought before him Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. (Rabbeinu Yona's version of *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, ibid.)

Rabbeinu Yona concludes with his own words:

Junior students must not be pushed aside by senior students, because kid goats become billy goats. About this, *Chazal* expounded: "In the morning, sow your seed, and in the evening, withhold not your hand" (*Kohelet* 11:6) – [even] if you raised up students in your youth, raise up students in your old age.

Every student has potential and every family has the possibility of reuniting. This is the deep message that we learn precisely from all the hardships and difficulties that Yaakov and his sons experienced.

[ This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Gigi on Shabbat *Parashat Vayeshev* 5780].