YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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

**PARASHAT VAYECHI**

**sicha of harav baruch gigi**

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Dedicated in memory of my grandmother,
Szore bat Simen Leib (Weinberger) z”l,
whose yahrzeit is on the 18th of Tevet.

May her soul be among the Righteous in Gan Eden.

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**Yaakov the Patriarch is Not Dead**

Summarized by Mordechai Simbol

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

*Parashat Vayechi* opens with a summary of the life of Yaakov Avinu:

And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Yaakov, the years of his life, were a hundred, forty, and seven years. (*Bereishit* 47:28)

The end of the book of *Bereishit* and the beginning of the book of *Shemot* are dedicated to transitioning from the story of the patriarchs, a story relating to individuals and a family, to the story of "the people of the children of Israel" (*Shemot* 1:9).

At the center of this transition stands Yaakov. Until Yaakov's death at the end of the book of *Bereishit*, all of the events take place around him. Yaakov's importance is highlighted by the following *midrash*:

Rabbi Nachman said to Rabbi Yitzchak: Let the Master expound something… He replied: Thus said Rabbi Yochanan: Yaakov the patriarch is not dead. He [Rabbi Nachman] objected: Was it then for nought that he was bewailed and embalmed and buried? The other replied: I derive this from a Scriptural verse, as it is stated: "Therefore, fear you not, O Yaakov, my servant, says the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel, for, lo, I will save you from afar and your seed from the land of their captivity" (*Yirmeyahu* 30:10). The verse likens him [Yaakov] to his seed [Israel]; as his seed is alive, so he too he is alive. (*Ta'anit* 5b)

On the face of it, the words of the *midrash* are difficult to understand. Following its logic, one could argue about anyone who is mentioned along with his descendants that "The verse likens him to his seed; as his seed is alive so he too he is alive." Why was this midrashic exposition stated specifically about Yaakov? The technical derivation from the verses is understandable, as the Torah says regarding Yaakov: "And he expired, and was gathered to his people" (*Bereishit* 49:33) – it does not say "He died," as we find in other places. But it may still be asked: What is the meaning of the statement that Yaakov is still alive?

**The Three Patriarchs**

It seems that the key to our question lies in the following *midrash*, about the names assigned to the site of the Temple:

Rabbi Elazar also said: What is meant by the verse: "And many people shall go and say: Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Yaakov"? "The God of Yaakov" – and not the God of Avraham and Yitzchak? But [the meaning is this: we will] not [be] like Avraham, in connection with whom "mountain" is written, as it is stated: "As it is said to this day, in the mountain where the Lord is seen" (*Bereishit* 22:14). Nor like Yitzchak, in connection with whom "field" is written, as it is stated: "And Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field" (*Bereishit* 24:63). But [let us be] like Yaakov, who called it "house," as it is stated: "And he called the name of that place Beit-El [the house of God]" (*Bereishit* 28:19). (*Pesachim* 58a)

What is the difference between the designations "mountain," "field," and "house"? The different terms seem to reflect different emphases in the service of God: Avraham's great goal is to “call out the name of God,” to glorify His name in the world. From his perspective, everyone can take part. Anyone who can stand on the mountain and call out the name of God can be God's representative in the world. Therefore, for him, there is not necessarily a difference between Yitzchak and Yishmael, since each of them could do the work equally. Avraham is "the father of a multitude of nations" (*Bereishit* 17:5), and this is truly how he behaves and conducts himself.

Compared to Avraham, Yitzchak called the place "field." A field is very different from a mountain; it is a much more personal and isolated place. People don't just walk into other people's fields. Yitzchak is connected to the land, and goes out to meditate in the field – quietly, alone. He is not looking for the great calling of the name of God before all the nations; he focuses on his inner world, and on building the nation of Israel as a separate entity.

In contrast, Yaakov called the place "house." At first glance, Yaakov is more similar to Yitzchak than to Avraham, as he focuses on the house – on building the nation of Israel. But a house includes another element, which we find on Chanuka when we light a "candle of a man and his house" (*Shabbat* 21b): unlike a field, a house is not supposed to remain private and closed, but to spread its inner light outward. This is the direction that Yaakov tries to emphasize: a strong construction of the house of Israel, which will lead to illumination for the entire world.

**"His bed was whole"**

Yaakov's uniqueness in relation to Avraham and Yitzchak stands out in another context:

Yaakov our father, whose bed was whole before him and no [one] unfit was found among them. (*Shir Ha-Shirim Rabba* 4, s.v. *ke-timrot ashan*)

That is to say, unlike Avraham and Yitzchak, none of Yaakov's sons were rejected from the chain of Avraham’s legacy; instead, they all joined together to build the nation of Israel. Even though they were all different, and each of them was special in his own way, they all followed the path of their father Yaakov, and thus they could unite together and create the nation of Israel.

*Chazal* explain the origin of the verse, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (*Devarim* 6:4):

Another explanation: From where did Israel merit to recite the *Shema*? When Yaakov inclined toward death, he called to all of the tribes and said to them: Perhaps after I will be gone from the world, you will bow down to another God?… They said to him: Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And he whispered after them: Blessed is the name of the glory of His kingdom forever. Rabbi Levi said: What do Israel say now? Here – O father – Israel! The same thing that you commanded us applies to us: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. (*Devarim Rabba* 2)

The joint answer of Yaakov's twelve sons, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one," means they all accepted Yaakov's mission upon themselves. They agreed to be the ones who establish the nation of Israel, who build the house of Israel and strengthen it so it can lead the whole world.

Through this *midrash*, the author of the *Or Ha-Chaim* (*Bereishit* 49:33) explains the statement that "Yaakov the patriarch is not dead." According to him, the *midrash* means that death did not take *control* of Yaakov: Yaakov's death was "at his will and with his permission," after he made sure that his mission would be passed on. Yaakov's mission did not die, and therefore, in essence, Yaakov as well did not die. As stated, the mission was passed on not to only some of his sons, but to all of them, for "his bed was whole, and no [one] unfit was found among them."

This is also the meaning of the statement, "Our father still lives, the nation of Israel lives." Our father still lives, because his mission continues – and this, because the nation of Israel lives.

*Am Yisrael chai.*

[This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Gigi on Shabbat *Parashat Vayechi* 5782.]