YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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

**Parashat Vayigash**

**Sicha of HarAV Mosheh Lichtenstein**

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Dedication by the Etshalom and Wise families
in memory of Mrs. Miriam Wise z”l,
Miriam bat Yitzhak veRivkah 9 Tevet.
Yehi Zikhra Barukh

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**"And he sent Yehuda before him … to show the way"**

Summarized by Mordechai Sambol

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

In the course of the account of Yaakov's descent into Egypt, we read: "And he sent Yehuda before him to Yosef, to show the way before him to Goshen" (*Bereishit* 46:28). Rashi writes that we should understand Yehuda’s role "like the Targum: to prepare a place for him and to show him how he will settle in it" (Rashi, ad loc.)

However, he also brings a midrashic explanation:[[1]](#footnote-1) "The *Midrash Aggada*: 'To show the way before him' [*le-horot lefanav*, which can also be understood as: 'to teach before him'] – to establish for him a house of study, from which teaching might go forth" (Rashi, ad loc.). Whereas according to the Targum, Yehuda was to engage in physical and material preparation, the *midrash* says Yehuda was instructed to establish a house of study in the land of Goshen. In other words, Yaakov knew it was important that the Israelites be able to live in Egypt from a physical perspective, but above all, it was important to him to ensure the establishment of a spiritual infrastructure for them.

**Teaching the Israelites**

Why was it important for Yaakov to establish a house of study precisely at this time? First of all, because they were coming to a new place. But beyond that, because this was not an ordinary new place, but a place of exile.

Exile means new challenges that must be faced. Yaakov had not forgotten the last time he was in exile, in Charan. He remembered what happened there, and how that exile affected the spiritual state of his family.

When Yaakov was in Charan, he focused less on education because he was mainly enslaved to his work for Lavan to support his family. When he returned to Israel, the results were clear: the Shekhem affair. In the wake of this, Yaakov understood that he had made a mistake and that he must begin investing more into the education of his children. Thus, after they left Shekhem, Yaakov instructed his family: "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments" (*Bereishit* 35:2).

Yaakov was not willing to allow such a thing to happen again. Therefore, even before he settled in Egypt, he sent Yehuda ahead of him to establish a house of study, so that he could build the spiritual infrastructure of the Israelites there.

**The Challenge in Exile**

We can also now explain more fully the challenge Yaakov anticipated. Why did he prioritize establishing a house of study specifically in the land of Goshen in Egypt, when he did not do so earlier, in the land of Canaan?

It stands to reason that this is related to the special challenge posed by the exiles – both in Charan and in Egypt. In Charan, Yaakov and his family were welcomed with open arms. There was no overt antisemitism; Yaakov married Lavan's daughters, and he was happily brought in to the family business. Similar to the challenge posed by exile in Western countries today, it is precisely that acceptance that creates the greatest challenge, because there is a real danger of excessive intermingling and assimilation. Egypt presented a similar concern. Pharaoh received the Israelites with great joy, gave them the best land, involved them in the economy, and wanted them to serve as officers in his army. Precisely when the attitude is so positive, it is of crucial importance that the Jews preserve their separate and distinct identity, because otherwise they may lose everything.

Before that, in the land of Canaan, there was no such fear: there was little interaction between the Israelites and the Canaanites, and the cultural gap was great. But in Egypt, the cultural difference was much smaller (although they were certainly idolaters) and the interface was very broad, thus the danger of assimilation was much greater. Yaakov knew he had to establish a house of study to prevent all kinds of values, thoughts, and beliefs from trickling in from Egyptian culture. The people of Israel were going to be in Egypt for many years, and eventually, whether consciously or unconsciously, they would be affected by their time there. That's why it was necessary to build the basis – the house of study – right from the very beginning.

**The Importance of Education**

These things are true in every generation. Towards the end of Israel's journey in the desert (*Devarim* 32), the people of Gad and Reuven ask to be given their tribal territory on the east bank of the Jordan. Many[[2]](#footnote-2) have pointed out that in their request, the people of Gad and Reuven mentioned first their flocks and only afterwards their children, implying that they valued their economic resources more than their children – in the wake of messages they had absorbed from Egyptian culture.

In his response, Moshe does not reject the very request, but he introduces a significant change. He relates first to their children and only then to their flocks. As we would formulate this, Moshe Rabbeinu tells the people of Gad and Reuven that they cannot choose a place of residence based on financial comfort, and then "make do" with their children's education; before all else, they must take care of their children, and only then take care of their property. Do not choose a place to live according to what is good for the flock, but according to what is good for the children. The emphasis must be on the children and their education – and not on the flocks.

In dealing with the education of the next generation, one must remember that there is always a gap between parents and their children: children always live in tension between emulating their parents and trying to be different from them. First of all, we must internalize that our children are not going to be identical to us. First, there is an age gap, and no matter how young and updated we think we are, for our children we have always been – and will always be – old. Moreover, everything that affects our children, the whole environment in which they grow up, is different from the environment in which we grew up.

In light of this, beyond the education imparted at home, it is extremely important to choose well our children's schools and places of education. These places have a significant impact on what will happen to our children, so their selection should be taken very seriously. The most important question in our lives is the question of our children's education; everything else should depend on that. Beyond that, education is what connects us to the chain of generations of the entire nation of Israel, and allows us to be the successors of everyone who came before us.

Education is not an important foundation in Judaism, but *the* foundation of Judaism. God chose Avraham Avinu, "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). That is to say, Avraham was chosen not only because of his personal virtue, but precisely because he educates his family to follow the path of righteousness and justice. From this the *Meshekh Chokhma* even learns that the education of children is a mitzvafrom the Torah. Even without agreeing with him, the point is clear: Education is the foundation of the existence – and continuity – of the people of Israel.

(This sicha was delivered at *seuda shelishit* on Shabbat Parashat Vayigash 5782 [2021].)

1. The source is *Midrash Bereishit Rabba*, *Vayigash* 95,3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Rashi, *Bamidbar* 32:16, and other commentators. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)