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 Hillel Rachmani**

**"And As for Me, When I Came from Padan"**

Translated by David Strauss

At the beginning of *Parashat Vayechi*, Yaakov calls for Yosef and makes him swear that he will not bury him in Egypt. Yosef takes an oath, and the meeting comes to an end.

At some later point, a second meeting takes place: "And it came to pass after these things, that one said to Yosef: Behold, your father is sick" (*Bereishit* 48:1). Realizing this will be a farewell meeting, Yosef brings his two sons with him. Yaakov recounts God’s appearance to him, repeats the blessings of nationhood and the land, and then turns his attention to Yosef's two sons, saying they will be considered like his own sons, Reuven and Shimon. At this point, Yaakov says: "And as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some way to come to Efrat; and I buried her there on the way to Efrat, which is Beit-Lechem" (*Bereishit* 48:7).

The commentators struggled to understand how this verse connects to the previous matters. Why does Yaakov suddenly mention the death of Rachel? Rashbam maintains that Yaakov recalls this tragic event here because Rachel’s death occurred after God gave His blessing to Yaakov. That is to say, what we have here is an associative progression in Yaakov's words. Alternatively, Rashi explains that Yaakov is apologizing for burdening Yosef with the task of burying him in Canaan, when he himself buried Rachel along the way to Efrat and not in the Makhpela cave in Hebron. Other commentators also adopted this interpretation, yet it is somewhat difficult, for Yaakov's request of Yosef to bury him in Canaan was made at their previous meeting and is not mentioned here at all.

In order to understand the dialogue here between Yaakov and Yosef, it may be suggested that a hidden discourse is taking place between them on the matter of the continuity of the house of Yaakov.

**Who will be chosen?**

Yosef understands that in the struggle between him and his brothers, he has come out on top. It is possible that this struggle centered on the question of who would continue the lineage and who would be cast out; he likely thought that one of Yaakov’s sons would be chosen as successor, as had been the case until now, and the rest would be rejected. The brothers tried to sell Yosef and cast him out, and now he has returned as leader and king. Yosef thus comes with his two sons to receive the appropriate blessing – the blessing of Avraham, the blessing of seed and land; the blessing that will make it clear that he is indeed the heir.

Indeed, Yaakov's opening words are exactly as expected: "And Yaakov said to Yosef: God Almighty appeared to me at Luz… and said to me: Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples; and I will give this land to your seed after you… And now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine…" (*Bereishit* 48:3-5). Let us pause here and try to understand how Yosef might have understood these words: he likely thought Yaakov was saying that Ephraim and Menashe, as Yosef’s sons, would be chosen, while Reuven, Shimon, and the rest of the brothers would be rejected. But Yaakov surprises Yosef: "…Ephraim and Menashe, *like Reuven and Shimon*, shall be mine." This sentence suddenly clarifies to Yosef that Yaakov sees everything differently. Yosef is not the chosen one and his sons are not the heirs; rather, all the sons together will succeed Yaakov as a united tribe.

We can easily understand why Yosef would be surprised and disappointed at this. After all, he was the son of Rachel – the primary mother, the beloved mother. All the other children were born only "on the way" to Rachel and her children. Wasn't it only natural that he would be *the* heir?

Yaakov understands Yosef's perplexity and responds: "And as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the way." Initially, he says, I too thought like you, but things changed when Rachel died on the way. Rachel's death was not only a personal tragedy for Yaakov; it was also a fundamental turning point in his perception of the course of Israel's development.

**The missing half – and a new whole**

In order to understand this point, we must return to the story of Yaakov's struggle with the angel upon his return to the land. This is undoubtedly a wondrous passage, beginning with the words: "And Yaakov remained alone" (*Bereishit* 32:25). These words hint that someone was missing, someone who could have been of assistance to Yaakov in his difficult struggle.

Another remarkable story, somewhat similar to ours, is the story of Moshe at the inn: "And it came to pass on the way, at the lodging place, that the Lord met him, and he sought to kill him" (*Shemot* 4:24). Moshe is in the middle of a mission from God, and he is threatened on the way. The nature of the threat is very unclear, but it is certainly very dangerous. Who saves the day? His wife, Tzippora. She takes the flint, circumcises her son's foreskin, and thus saves Moshe.

Yaakov, too, was in the midst of a Divine mission – his return to the land of Canaan. Yaakov, too, was threatened, but he was left alone. His partner, Rachel, was not there with him.

Had Rachel been with Yaakov, they could have jointly repelled the threat. Yaakov's limp after the struggle expresses the fact that Yaakov was indeed harmed in the struggle. Rachel's subsequent death (in chapter 35), of course, is far more severe damage.

Our Sages tell us that the “man” who wrestled with Yaakov was "the angel of Esav" (*Bereishit Rabba* 77:3), and the suitable contenders to fight with the angel of Esav would be "the angels" of Yaakov and Rachel. Yaakov and Rachel represent the higher spiritual worlds: Yaakov represents the Divine light that wishes to dwell in the world, while Rachel represents the world that receives the supernal light. In the past, the serpent had succeeded in preventing the union of Adam and Chava; in the future, the golden calf would separate Israel from their Father in Heaven; and now, on the way to Canaan, the angel of Esav is fighting the union that could bring about the full repair.

The antagonist can win when the couple is apart; the Israelites were without Moshe when they sinned with the golden calf, Chava was without Adam when the serpent persuaded her to eat from the tree, and here, too, it is when Yaakov is alone that he is wounded. His injury is only partial – he is left with a limp – but the indirect damage is very severe: Rachel dies soon after.

Yaakov understands that Rachel's death signifies that the time of the complete repair has not yet come. He had wanted to achieve complete repair together with Rachel, but it turns out that he must follow a different path, a path that includes Leah and her children, and thus also the two maidservants and their children.

**From Yaakov and Rachael to Leah and Rachel – sharing in the repair of the world**

In Kabbala, Leah is the "hidden world" (*alma de-itkasya*) – "And Leah's eyes were weak" (*Bereishit* 29:17) – while Rachel is the "revealed world" (*alma de-itgalya*) – "and Rachel was of beautiful form and fair to look upon" (ibid.). The process of repairing the world always moves from the inside out, from the hidden to the revealed. Complete repair of the world is a total rectification that brings the light of holiness to the outside as well.

It was the aspiration of Yaakov – the man who walks in dark places, the man who instituted the evening prayer, the man who walks along dangerous and complicated paths – to bring light and repair to every corner. Rachel was his partner, and the bond between them, the unification of their spiritual dimensions, could have brought about complete repair.

Rachel died, but Yosef was her firstborn, the natural successor to her essence. Yosef was also “of beautiful form and fair to look upon” (*Bereishit* 39:6), he spoke many languages, and he lived among the nations of the world, and with all that, he maintained his purity and regularly mentioned the name of God. Despite Yosef’s youthful lapses, Yaakov saw the potential inherent in his personality – "and his father kept the matter in mind" (*Bereishit* 37:11). Yosef would be able to bring about the complete repair; he would be able to bring the light of inner holiness to vast expanses, to rectify even far-flung worlds. This was Yaakov's hope. But the vicissitudes of their lives, the various events that befell both Yaakov and Yosef, made it clear to Yaakov that the dream could not yet be fulfilled. The first crack in the edifice came with the death of Rachel on the way, and subsequent events reinforced and clarified for Yaakov that the path to repair would not be completed so easily.

In a sense, the events that occurred with Yitzchak and Esav repeated themselves in the generation of Yaakov’s children. Yitzchak, who went out to meditate in the field, knew how to appreciate Esav – the man of the field. He was not unduly influenced by Esav's coarse external behavior, but could see the inner sanctity enshrined within him. When Esav asked how to tithe straw and salt, Yitzchak did not interpret this as a crafty question, but as a profound one: "Is there something of the holy in the straw, in the outer world?" Esav, the hairy one, saw himself as a man of externals, but within him there was a spark of the highest holiness. Yitzchak hoped to reveal that light and bring about the complete repair. When he smelled Esav's garments, "he said: See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed" (*Bereishit* 27:27). But Rivka's action, based on the prophecy: "And the elder shall serve the younger" (*Bereishit* 25:23), made it clear that Esav was not yet worthy. A vast gulf existed between his external and internal dimensions. Yaakov, a simple man and a dweller of tents, could uncover the deep inner essence of things. Even though he dwelled within a tent, in a confined and hidden place, he could nevertheless manage to connect the external and internal worlds.

Yosef, Rachel’s son, was similar to Esav in his predilection for externals. While it is true that the two dimensions, the inner sanctity and the externals, came very close together in Yosef, they did not reach the point of unity. Yosef appears on the one hand as an Egyptian in every respect – in his name, in his marriage, and in his behavior – but on the other hand, he maintains an uncompromisingly high and holy standard.

The personality of Leah’s son Yehuda is brought into sharp relief in contrast to that of Yosef. Yehuda is caught up in reality, involved in all its details. Yehuda connects the inner and the outer; he sins and repents and emerges as a powerful leader whose entire personality is engaged in the thicket of events, right in the middle of whatever happens: "And Yehuda said: She is more righteous than I" (*Bereishit* 38:26); "And Yehuda approached him" (*Bereishit* 44:18).

The connection between internals and externals is realized in Yehuda. It happens in a narrower domain than that of Yosef – "And he sent Yehuda before him to Yosef, to show [the way] before him to Goshen" (*Bereishit* 46:28) – but with him, there is a connection between the inner and the outer.

We can now return to Yaakov's words to Yosef. Yaakov clarifies to Yosef that the husk, the barrier separating the worlds – which does not allow Yaakov to be joined to Rachel, to connect the inner dimension to all the expanses of the outer worlds – that husk is still in force. A long way will still have to be traversed before holiness will spread over all the worlds. But reparative steps have been taken. Yehuda achieves the unification of the worlds in certain areas, and Yosef, unlike Esav, is included in sanctity. But the repair will be made based on the two of them, one from his side and the other from his side.

According to this, we can understand the process at the time of the redemption. Mashiach ben Yosef precedes Mashiach ben David. The stage of Mashiach ben Yosef is a stage of preparation of the external side, when the world of holiness operates only in secret: "Good on the inside, but bad on the outside" (*Tikkunei Zohar* 109:1). This is the stage leading to the world of Mashiach ben David (from Yehuda), which is a more restricted but unified world, where the worlds have come together. In the next stage, the unified and restricted world will begin to expand outward, to those realms where there was still division, where the holy will sanctify the profane and the camp of holiness will spread from the inner two thousand cubits to the expansive twelve mil.

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(Edited by Sarah Rudolph)