

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

רב מאיר שמחה הכהן מדווינסק זצ"ל פְּרִשְׁת תוֹלְדוֹת תשפ"ה

Shulie Plawes

וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתִּלְךְ לְדַרְשׁ אֶת ה' . וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לָהּ שְׁנֵי גֵימִים/גוֹיִם
בְּבֶטְנָךְ... (פרק כה' כב-כג)

The children agitated within (Rivkah), and she said, "If so, why am I thus?" And she went to inquire of Hashem. And Hashem said to her, "Two nations are in your womb..."

Rashi dramatically tells us: "Because the pasuk is vague as to what this רְצִיצָה is, it is clearly saying, 'Expound me!' And from her question, אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי, it is obvious that Rivkah was bothered by more than just the expected discomfort of pregnancy. Our Rabbis (in Midrash Rabba) expounded וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ as meaning 'running'. When Rivkah would pass by entrances of the Torah study halls of Shem and Ever, Yaakov would run and toss about to go out of his mother's womb. When she would pass by entrances of places of idol worship, Eisav would run to go out." The answer she is given is equally dramatic, as Rashi, based on עבודה זרה יא. says: "(Although it is read as גוֹיִם,) it is spelled גֵימִים/*proud ones*-these are the Roman Emperor, Antoninus, a descendant of Eisav, and his contemporary, Rabbi, R' Yehuda HaNasi, for neither radish nor lettuce were absent from their tables, not during the sunny season or during the rainy season i.e., they were *proud ones* in that they were so wealthy that they could afford to have seasonal products all year round."

Several Mefarshim are bothered though. How exactly does שְׁנֵי גֵימִים/גוֹיִם בְּבֶטְנָךְ address Rivkah's question, אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי?

The Ohr HaChaim, in a not-often-seen complete divergence from *his* Rebbe, understands this episode as follows: "Rashi explains that Rivkah's query was 'if the pain involved in giving birth is so intense, why did I bother to pray to become pregnant?' It is difficult to reconcile our image of the pious and righteous Rivkah even thinking that the pain was not worth her becoming a mother. Also, if that had been her real concern, how did Hashem's response alleviate her?" He continues: "The plain meaning of the word וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ is from the root רצץ, to crush. Since there were two fetuses in her womb she felt as if her womb was being crushed. She was afraid that she could not complete her pregnancy and would have a miscarriage. Her question then was rhetorical, i.e., 'what good was my becoming pregnant if this pregnancy will not be completed successfully?' The words וַתִּלְךְ לְדַרְשׁ אֶת ה' mean that she prayed to Hashem to let her complete her pregnancy without mishap. She felt that the miracle of her becoming pregnant after all these years surely should not be wasted by her not giving birth to a healthy child. Hashem responded to her fear by explaining that there was nothing 'medically' wrong with her but rather, that she was carrying two instead of one fetus.

Whereas normally, when a mother expects twins, the two fetuses 'get along' inside the womb, in Rivkah's case they did not. Hence her feeling of being crushed. She did not merely carry twins but each one was destined to become a nation with vastly distinct characteristics from one another... and that is why they did not conform to the usual pattern of twins... And thus, Hashem reassured her that there was nothing wrong with her womb."

Rav Meir Simcha's approach is quite different. He begins with a statement from R' Abba bar Kahana in שבת קמו. "Until three generations passed, the זיהמא, the spiritual poison of the *Nachash*, did not cease from our Avos: Avraham fathered a Yishmael; (Likewise) Yitzchak fathered an Eisev; finally, though, Yaakov fathered twelve tribes in whom there was no flaw." Rivkah's perspective was different. She noticed that although Avraham could not purge the זיהמא and therefore produced Yishmael, Sarah, on the other hand, produced pure *tov*-Yitzchak. Rivkah was not questioning her unusual uncomfortableness-she understood that this was to be expected when carrying twins. But, as per the previously mentioned Midrash's understanding of ויתרצו הבנים בקרבה, Rivkah realized from the fact that when she would pass by entrances of places of idol worship, one of the twins tried to escape, that she will be giving birth to a child who will be pure evil i.e., Eisav. אם כן למה זה אנכי was Rivkah questioning why *she* was not privileged to be like Sarah, from whom no evil came i.e., why is it, she asked, and as Rav Meir Simcha writes, ולא ברו לה הטוב לעצמו that the Heavens did not choose for her to have just pure *tov*? This question could only be answered by a prophet with access to דברי אלקים. When she was told ונתלך לדרש את ה' that Eisav's progeny will include the likes of Antoninus, she was assuaged. Why? In עבודה זרה י. we are told that "every day Antoninus would minister to Rebbi; he would feed him and give him to drink. When Rebbi wanted to ascend to his bed, Antoninus would bend down in front of it and say to him, 'Ascend upon me.' Rebbi told him: 'It is not proper conduct to treat the king with this much disrespect.' Antoninus said: 'Oh, that I were set as a mattress under you in the World-to-Come!' On another occasion, Antoninus said to Rebbi, 'Will I enter the World-to-Come?' He said to him, 'Yes.' Antoninus replied, 'But isn't it written, ולא יהיה שריד לבית עשו/And there shall not be any remaining of the house of Eisav?' Rebbi answered: 'The verse is stated with regard to those who perform actions similar to those of the wicked Eisav, not to people like you.'" So that even the evil Eisav was not *pure*. There was DNA in him that had the potential to be טוב. Although not as ideal as Sarah's outcome, where another woman, Hagar, produced the evil, Rivkah was sufficiently appeased. A refreshingly new look at Rivkah's perception of her place in the history of our Nation.

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל
לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדר ע"ה
לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל
ולזכר נשמת הרב יהודה בן ר' אברהם שמחה (קופרמן) זצ"ל
מחבר הגהות על ספר משך חכמה