

(כב) וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבְּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם-כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתִּלְקֶה לְדָרֶשׁ אֶת־הָ.

(כג) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לָהּ שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבִטְנָהּ וּשְׁנֵי לְאָמִים מִמֶּעֶינֶיהָ יִפְרְדוּ וּלְאִם מִלְאִם יֵאָמֵץ וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר.

Answer to  
Question 5

place, and she was the daughter and sister of wicked people. Because of the spiritual impurity that prevailed in her origins she could give birth to an Esav. [This answers Question 5.] The verse concludes with the words “[Yitzchak took Rivkah] **for himself** as a wife.” The seemingly extra words “for himself” highlight the point that despite her background, Rivkah was truly Yitzchak’s soul-mate, for she was completely righteous down to the very core of her being. From the aspect of her origins she was able to give birth to Esav; however, from the aspect of her essence she could give birth to Yaakov.

## THE BATTLE BETWEEN ESAV AND YAAKOV BEGINS IN THE WOMB

Consider the following questions:

1. The word וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ (verse 22) is very unusual.<sup>19</sup> What is it coming to tell us?
2. The phrases “Two peoples are in your womb” and “two nations from your insides will be separated” seem to be saying the same thing. Why do we need both?

18. This is the most straightforward translation of the phrase וּלְאִם מִלְאִם יֵאָמֵץ. We shall see that the Alshich renders it differently.

19. The word רָצַץ normally means to “crush” or “break.” This is the only place in Tanach that this form of the word (וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ) is used.

3. How will it help allay Rivkah's concerns to be told that one nation will be stronger than the other, etc.? This would seem to have the opposite effect.
4. After telling Rivkah that *one nation will be stronger than the other nation*, why does God add, "...and the older will serve the younger"?

The Sages<sup>20</sup> offer several interpretations of the verse, *The children struggled (וַיִּתְרָצְצוּ)* within her. Two of them are as follows:

- (1) Whenever Rivkah passed by a Beis Midrash, Yaakov moved about [inside the womb] and "ran" (רָץ) to get out. Whenever she passed by a place of idol worship Esav moved about and "ran" (רָץ) to get out.
- (2) Each one "ran" (i.e., sought) to kill the other.

The first interpretation simply relates the word וַיִּתְרָצְצוּ to the root רוץ, which means "run," and states that Yaakov and Esav each "ran" to get out of the womb at different times. The second interpretation focuses on the fact that the verb is written in the התפַּעַל (reflexive) form,<sup>21</sup> which indicates that each of them was going to be killed.<sup>22</sup> Both explanations are necessary and complement each other. [This answers Question 1.]

According to this Midrash, two different things were troubling Rivkah: the strong movements she sensed in her womb whenever she passed by a Beis Midrash or a house of idolatry, and the constant struggling and battling she felt going on within her. So *she went to enquire of God* what was the cause of all this turbulence.

20. *Bereishis Rabbah* 63:6.

21. As indicated by the letters תִּתְרָצְצוּ that precede the root רוץ.

22. [In this case, through the actions of the other.] It appears, as Radal writes on the Midrash, that this interpretation takes וַיִּתְרָצְצוּ as incorporating not only "running" (רוץ) but also "crushing" (רָצַץ).

God replied, “*Two peoples are in your womb. You are carrying twins, and they are already of opposite natures and opposite faiths. Therefore, do not be concerned that you feel a baby attempting to emerge when you pass by two such different houses of worship.*”

Then God addressed Rivkah’s other concern, viz., that she felt a constant battle going on inside her. He said to her, “*Two nations (מְלָכִים) from your insides will be separated.*” There are two separate nations (kingdoms) here — and it is the nature of nations (kingdoms) to fight one another. Do not be amazed that these two kingdoms are battling already now, when you are still pregnant, since *from your insides [they] will be separated.* That is, the separation between Yaakov and Esav has indeed already begun in the womb itself. As we learned above,<sup>23</sup> Esav drew into him all the impurity associated with the menstrual blood, while Yaakov remained completely pure. [This answers Question 2.]

Now, it happens that kings and kingdoms do not constantly wage war with one another. This is generally for one of two reasons: (1) Each king is afraid of losing the battle against the other, which would diminish his power as well as his honor. (2) The lesser king realizes his inferiority compared to the greater king and is ashamed to wage war against his more prestigious enemy.

God told Rivkah that neither of these reasons applied to Yaakov and Esav. The first one wasn’t relevant because the phrase *וְיָצְאָה מִלְּאֵם מְלָכִים* does not simply mean that one nation will be stronger than the other. It means that “Each nation will gain strength from [the downfall of] the other nation.” In other words, the only way each can become strong is from the defeat of the other one. When the nation of Yaakov (Israel) rises, the nation of Esav (Rome) falls, and vice versa.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, neither kingdom

Answer to  
Question 2

23. See Alshich above, 25:19–22, in the first answer to Question 7.

24. See *Megillah* 6a, citing our verse.

## Chapter 25

(24) Her days reached their completion for her to give birth and there were twins (תּוֹמָם) in her womb.

(25) The first one came out a reddish color, all of him as hairy as a fur coat; so they named him Esav (עֵשָׂו).

(26) After that his brother came out, his hand clutching Esav's heel (בְּעֵקֶב); so he named him Yaakov (יַעֲקֹב) and Yitzchak was sixty years old when [Rivkah] gave birth to them.

Answer to  
Question 3

will be afraid of having its honor and sovereignty diminished by going to war, for if it does not subdue its rival, it will not have any honor or power. [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to  
Question 4

We can see that the second reason doesn't apply from the words, *The older will serve the younger*. It is fitting that the older (Esav) serve the younger (Yaakov), because the younger one is holy. However, Esav will never agree to this, since he is the older and stronger of the two. And Yaakov will never regard Esav as his superior, since Yaakov is more elevated and holy. Therefore, neither king will submit to the other one, and the battle between them will therefore never cease. [This answers Question 4.]

### THE BIRTH OF YAAKOV AND ESAV

When speaking of Rivkah, the Torah states, “*Her days (of pregnancy) reached their completion*” (verse 24). By contrast, in regard to Tamar the Torah expresses itself differently: “*It was at the time she gave birth*” (*Bereishis* 38:27).<sup>25</sup> According to the Midrash,<sup>26</sup> this teaches us that Tamar's pregnancy did not reach its full term

25. Tamar became pregnant from Yehudah and gave birth to twins. (The entire story is recounted in *Bereishis* Ch. 38.) See Alshich further.

26. *Bereishis Rabbah* 63:8; 85:13.