

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 (עֵקֶב); 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).²⁵ According to the Midrash,²⁶ 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.

(כד) וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לִלְדֹת וְהָיָה תוֹמָם בְּבִטְנָהּ.

(כה) וַיֵּצֵא הָרֵאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוֹנִי כְּלוּ כְּאֲדָרֶת שֶׁעַר וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו.

(כו) וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יָצָא אָחִיו וַיְדֹ אַחֲזֵת בְּעֵקֶב עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּצְחַק בֶּן־שָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה בְּלִדְתָּ אֹתָם.

(completion) the way Rivkah’s did; Tamar gave birth prematurely, after six months and three days.”²⁷

Consider the following questions:

1. Since we see from Tamar’s case that healthy twins can be born early, why did God not shorten Rikva’s pregnancy? It would seem that He should have done so for Rivkah more than for Tamar, because Rikva’s pregnancy was so painful and traumatic.²⁸
2. The word for “twins” in Hebrew is generally written תְּאוּמִים and we find that spelling with regard to Tamar’s twins. Why is it written in verse 24 without the *א* and *י* (תוּמִם)?
3. Verse 24 seems to imply that only after Rivkah’s pregnancy was completed were there twins in her womb. Since this obviously cannot be, what does it mean?²⁹
4. What is the connection between the name Esav (עֵשָׂו) and his being born covered with hair?

27. Our Midrash text does not state the length of Tamar’s pregnancy, only that it was not full term.

28. As the Alshich adds, Rivkah found her pregnancy so difficult that she proclaimed that she did not want to give birth to ten more children and be the mother of the twelve tribes — even though she was worthy of doing so (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 63:6).

29. The Alshich adds: One could interpret the *pasuk* to mean that the fact that she had twins was recognized only after Rivkah gave birth. But this is obvious, too! Furthermore, we cannot explain the *pasuk* this way, because the word לִלְדָה, *to give birth*, implies that she had not yet given birth.

5. Why was Yaakov (יעקב) named for the fact that he was born clutching Esav's heel (עקב), when this is seemingly only a minor detail of the birth?
6. What is the relevance of telling us at this point that Yitzchak was sixty years old?

According to the Midrash cited above, the word for twins (תאומים) is written in verse 24 without the letter א (תומים) because one of Rivkah's twins was a *rasha*. Since both of Tamar's twins were *tzaddikim*,³⁰ the word is written in its full form in that passage. This can be explained as follows: The letter א has the numerical value of one and symbolizes unity and oneness. Since the souls of *tzaddikim* are connected to each other and unite in their essence, it is appropriate that the word for twins who are righteous should contain that letter. But since there is a vast gulf and disunity between the soul of a *tzaddik* and that of a *rasha*, it is appropriate that the word for twins of this nature should lack this letter.

Written without the א, the word "תומים" appears to be related to the word תם, which means "completed" or "finished." Like the word "twins" (the plain meaning of "תומים"), this word is also very appropriate for our verse. Over the last several *pesukim*³¹ we have been describing the vital process that was occurring during Rivkah's pregnancy: Esav was drawing into himself all the *zuhama* that had its origin in the sin of Adam and Chavah, thus enabling Yaakov to be formed in complete purity. Our *pasuk* now adds that it was specifically through Rivkah's having a full nine-month pregnancy (*her days reached their completion for her to give birth*), giving

30. Tamar's twins were Peretz and Zerach. *Bereishis Rabbah* 63:8 states that both were *tzaddikim*.

31. See Alshich above, 25:19–22.

Esav the maximum time possible to draw out all the *zuhama*, that Yaakov and Esav were able to be “complete” in their respective aspects (*there was תּוּמָם — completeness — in her womb*).³² [This answers Questions 2 and 3.] This would also explain why Rivkah’s pregnancy had to reach full term even though she was in great agony and turmoil. If they had been born any earlier, the differentiation process between the two would not have been complete, and Yaakov would not have emerged purified of all the *zuhama*. [This answers Question 1.]

Answer to
Questions
2 and 3

Answer to
Question 1

Verse 25 clearly implies that Esav was given his name because he was born covered in hair from head to toe, unlike a normal baby: *The first one came out ... all of him as hairy as a fur coat; so they named him Esav (עֵשָׂו)*. But what is the connection between the two (Question 4)?

The Sages³³ have explained that the name *Esav* (עֵשָׂו) means “a vain, or empty, creation” (אֶשׂוּ). This explains the last two letters (שׁו). We may add that the first letter of Esav’s name, *ayin* (ע), has the numerical value of 70. This signifies that when the people present at his birth saw Esav all covered in hair, they realized that he was enveloped in the 70 forces of emptiness, i.e. impurity.³⁴ [This answers Question 4.]

Answer to
Question 4

We asked above why Yaakov (יַעֲקֹב) was named for the seemingly minor detail of clutching Esav’s heel (עָקַב) at birth.

32. As the Alshich wrote there: The elevated soul became suffused with holiness and emerged as Yaakov, while the impure soul drew into itself all the *zuhama* and emerged as Esav.

33. *Bereishis Rabbah* 63:8.

34. The Alshich does not explain here why the “coat” of hair represents the forces of impurity, nor the significance of the number 70. Regarding the hair, we may explain on a simple level that Esav’s being born like that gave him an impure, animal-like appearance. As to the number 70, the early Kabbalistic work *Sefer HaBahir* (#166) speaks of 70 building forces of creation (שִׁבְעִים קוּמוֹת). Since we know that God created negative forces as a parallel to the positive forces (see *Da’as Tevunos*, section 132), it follows that there must be 70 of them as well.

However, by looking more carefully at Yaakov's name, we see that while it does center on the fact that Esav was born first, it is not the whole story. If that were the case, he should have been named עֲקֵב, which is in the past tense (*he followed on the heel*), rather than יַעֲקֹב, which is the future tense (*he will follow on the heel*).

The following Midrash³⁵ will help us answer this question:

A certain Roman general inquired of Rabban Gamliel, "Who will acquire the rulership of the world after us?" Rabban Gamliel wrote back to him [the verse], "*His hand [was] clutching Esav's heel.*"³⁶

Clearly, Yaakov's grasping of Esav's heel was a symbol of something much deeper.

The Midrash elsewhere³⁷ teaches that Esav's inheritance consists of this world (עוֹלָם הַזֶּה), and Yaakov's inheritance is the World to Come (עוֹלָם הַבָּא). Because this world is a preparation for the future world, it comes first — even though *Olam Haba* is of greater importance.³⁸ In like manner, even though Yaakov was the holy one and the more important, it is Esav who was born first, because his inheritance and his rulership were to come first.

This fact is Israel's consolation in their current [downtrodden and oppressed] state. Yaakov was named יַעֲקֹב (future tense) to symbolize that while Esav was born first, and would indeed rule

35. *Yalkut Shimoni, Toldos* 110.

36. See also *Bereishis Rabbah* 63:9.

37. See *Yalkut Shimoni, Toldos* 110; *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zuta* 19.

38. The Alshich adds that this is also the reason that it says on each of the six days of creation, "*It was evening and it was morning,*" rather than the other way around. Since "evening" symbolizes this world, and "morning" symbolizes the World to Come, evening comes first.

first, Yaakov would ultimately prevail. Esav has power over Israel in this world because this world is Esav's portion, and it comes first. But in the end Israel will take what is his. In the Messianic era, after the Resurrection of the Dead (תְּחִיית הַמֵּתִים), it will be Yaakov (Israel) who rules. [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to
Question 5

It remains for us to answer our last question. Verse 26 states: *After that his brother came out, his hand clutching Esav's heel (עֲקֵב); so he named him Yaakov.* Now, although the text doesn't tell us who named Yaakov, according to the simple meaning of the *pasuk* it was Yitzchak. But in light of what we have explained, that Yaakov's name was based on what would happen at the end of history, one might well ask how Yitzchak knew all this. The verse therefore continues: "...and Yitzchak was sixty years old when [Rivkah] gave birth to them." It is at age 60 that a person acquires a full measure of wisdom,³⁹ and we may assume that Yitzchak by that age had attained *ruach hakodesh*. He was thus able to perceive what would happen in future generations — and he knew who would be a *tzaddik* (Yaakov) and who would be a *rasha* (Esav). [This answers Question 6.] This also explains why Yitzchak personally gave Yaakov his name, while Esav's name was given to him by those who were present at his birth (so "they" named him Esav). Yitzchak only wanted to name his righteous son; he had no desire to be the one to bestow a name upon the wicked Esav.

Answer to
Question 6

39. The Alshich alludes here to the Sages' statement (*Pirkei Avos* 5:21): בְּןֵי שֵׁשִׁים לְזִקְנָה — at the age of sixty, one reaches "old age," i.e., the age of wisdom (see *Kiddushin* 32b; Rambam, *Hilchos Talmud Torah* 6:1).