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(21) Yitzchak pleaded with God opposite his wife since she was barren; God heard his plea and Rivkah his wife became pregnant.

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6. If Yitzchak was destined to have one righteous son and one wicked son, why did God not have him marry another woman, of lower standing, who could have given birth to the wicked child instead of Rikva — just like Avraham's second wife, Hagar, gave birth to Yishmael instead of Sarah? And what sin did Rivkah commit that it was she who had to bear the wicked Esav?²
7. Even if Rivkah had to be the one to bear both children, why did the two have to be born at the same time (as twins)? If they had been born separately, she could have avoided the traumatic pregnancy she suffered, and Yaakov would not have had to endure Esav's presence in the womb (see verse 22).

2. The Alshich assumes that someone as wicked as Esav could not have been born to someone as free of spiritual impurity (*zuhama*) as Yitzchak (as described in the text below). It therefore must have been through some lack in Rivkah.

In order to answer these questions, let us analyze a Midrash. *Tehillim* 105:8 states: דְּבַר צְוָה לְאֶלֶף דּוֹר, *He (God) commanded the Torah* (lit., the word) *for the thousandth generation*. Based on this *pasuk*, the Midrash³ states that God originally intended to give the Torah to the thousandth generation of mankind. At the end, however, He dispensed with 974 of those generations and gave it to the Jewish people in the 26th generation of humanity.⁴

This Midrash obviously requires explanation. Why was the Torah supposed to have been given only after 1000 generations? And why did God reduce that number by exactly 974?

We have explained elsewhere⁵ that since God wanted the Jewish people to realize that He had given the Torah to each and every one of them, it was necessary for Him to speak directly to each person.⁶ But for this to happen, every single Jew would have to be worthy of prophecy — and this was not possible so long as man was still infected with the spiritual pollution (*zuhama*) that entered man's being when the snake caused Adam and Eve to sin in Gan Eden. God saw that in the natural course of events it would take a thousand generations for mankind to be cleansed of this pollution to the point that they would be worthy of receiving the Torah. However, as time went on, God also saw that without the Torah to refine him, man would never survive a thousand generations. Unfortunately, humanity was using its freedom of choice to engage in the type of evil behavior that would bring the world to destruction long before that time would come. Man therefore needed to receive the Torah much, much sooner.

What did God do? He removed 974 generations from the 1000, leaving 26 generations — the number corresponding to the

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numerical value of God's four-letter Name, ה-ו-ה-י.⁷ The world would be able to survive 26 generations even without the Torah to sustain it, through the sustaining power of God's great Name.⁸ But there was still one major problem: If it really takes 1000 generations to purify man, how could this be achieved within 26? The answer is that God arranged matters in such a way that one part of humanity (namely, the Jewish people), through a series of extraordinary events, would be purified of the ill effects of the *zuhama* in the space of just a few generations. This process started with Avraham and culminated at Mount Sinai.

The process of purification began when Avraham was thrown into a fiery furnace by Nimrod. It continued when God brought him to Eretz Yisrael, where he was subjected to further tests, ten in all [culminating in the *Akeidah*]. A large portion of *zuhama* was thus removed from Avraham.

God then went to great lengths to ensure that Yitzchak would be born in a state that was almost completely purified of the *zuhama*. First, He arranged for Avraham have his first child (Yishmael) through Hagar, and for this to occur while Avraham was still uncircumcised. Because Hagar was an Egyptian, she drew much of the remaining *zuhama* into herself; and an uncircumcised state attracts *zuhama* to itself as well. In addition, Avraham was nearly 100 years old when he fathered Yitzchak and had almost entirely subdued his *yetzer hara*.⁹ Meanwhile, Sarah was ninety when she gave birth to Yitzchak, and had long since ceased to

7. י = 10, ה = 5, ו = 6, and ה = 5, for a total of 26.

8. The four-letter Name ה-ו-ה-י represents God's Attribute of Mercy. It seems that this is what the Alshich means by saying that this Name can sustain the world.

9. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 46:2 and Alshich to *Parashas Vayeira* 21:2–5 (at footnote 123). One of the primary consequences of Adam and Chavah's eating of the Tree of Knowledge was that the *yetzer hara*, which had previously been external to man (personified as the snake), became an intrinsic part of him. See *Nefesh HaChaim, Sha'ar* 1 Ch. 6 (in gloss). Subduing one's *yetzer hara* thus equaled overcoming of the effects of Adam and Chavah's sin.

menstruate. Now, menstruation was one of the consequences of the *zuhama* caused by Chavah's sin.¹⁰ The fact that Sarah conceived Yitzchak when she was no longer menstruating thus means that she was free of this effect of the *zuhama*.¹¹ These factors all combined to ensure that Yitzchak was born in a state of great purity.

Nevertheless, Yitzchak was not born completely purified of the effects of the *zuhama* — and even the *Akeidah* did not complete his purification. Therefore, when his turn came to bear offspring he should seemingly have done as his father and diverted whatever *zuhama* was left into a woman such as Hagar before fathering his true offspring, Yaakov. However, he could not do this. Through the *Akeidah*, Yitzchak had become sanctified (*Chazal* refer to Yitzchak as an עֹלָה תְּמִימָה, a pure sacrifice), and it was not permissible for him to marry anyone but his destined wife, the *tzaddekes* Rivkah. This also meant, of course, that there was no choice but to have Rivkah bear the wicked Esav. [This answers Question 6.]

Answer to
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Indeed, this is why the Torah makes the statement here (and not earlier) that Yitzchak was 40 years old when he married Rivkah: Since the *Akeidah* took place when Yitzchak was 37,¹² the statement that he was now 40 makes it clear that the events now being described occurred after the *Akeidah* — and therefore Yitzchak could not marry another woman as his father had done. [This answers Question 4.]

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Let us now explain why Esav and Yaakov had to be born together. The Midrash¹³ says:

The first one (Esav) emerged red (Bereishis 25:25). Why is this? When [the fetus] was in its mother's womb, it "drank" all of its mother's menstrual blood.

10. See *Eruvin* 100b: Chavah was cursed with ten curses, etc.

11. See Alshich above, *Parashas Vayeira*, footnote 122.

12. Rashi on verse 25:20.

13. *Yalkut Shimoni, Toldos* 110.

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