חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

NADVORNA · ARVEI NACHAL, TOLDOT

Why was Rivkah's pregnancy so painful?

Arvei Nachal

Rivkah's painful pregnancy is explained as the result of pressing the End through excessive prayer, which brings a matter before its time with suffering, though her prayer did not cause the twins' conflict. Drawing on the Shelah and the Ari, the author explains that Yaakov and Esav had to be conceived as twins in one womb so that Yaakov would draw to himself all the good and Esav all the evil, and the resulting opposition within that womb, which Rashi reads in "from your womb they shall be separated," is what made the pregnancy painful. AI SUMMARY

"And they struggled" (Bereshit 25:22). The Holy One, blessed be He, made Israel swear not to press the End. A matter that comes in its proper time has already clothed itself within nature, and there is no obstructer, no Satan, and no evil mishap. Therefore that matter comes gently and without pain. It is otherwise if they press the End, that is, if they multiply prayer (even though the Mighty G-d does not despise) and the redemption comes before its time. Then there will be many accusers, and that matter will come with much pain and suffering.

Now, when Rivkah saw that she was in pain, she reasoned that the matter had surely come before its time. For on her side the matter should have been delayed longer, since the Holy One, blessed be He, desired her prayer. The pregnancy did not hasten to come except through the urging of Yitzchak, so it came before its time, and therefore she was in pain and suffering.

If so, she regretted that she had begun to pray at the outset. Had she not prayed at all and left the whole burden to Yitzchak alone, his first prayer would have borne fruit, and she would have had no pain and suffering. There would have been no delay on account of the Holy One, blessed be He, desiring her prayer, etc., since she would not have wanted to pray at all.

This is why she said, "If so, why am I praying for children?" That is to say: now I understand that not only did I not repair by my prayer, I even spoiled. For if so, and Hashem, may He be blessed, desires my prayer, I am now compelled to pray over this pain. This is the meaning of "And she went to inquire of Hashem" (Bereshit 25:22), namely to pray, as in "Seek Hashem when He can be found, etc." (Isaiah 55:6).

"And Hashem said to her" (Bereshit 25:23) that this pain is not as she thinks, but rather: "Two nations, etc., and two peoples shall be separated from your womb." Rashi explains: from the womb they are separated, this one to his righteousness, etc. He means, according to what the Shelah wrote, that this is why Yaakov and Esav had to be twins in one womb. Hashem, may He be blessed, wanted Yaakov to be entirely good and Esav entirely evil. This is impossible where good and evil are mixed together, and every child that is born comes about through a mixture of pure bloods with impure bloods. This accords with what the Ari, of blessed memory, wrote (Likutei Torah on this verse): Yaakov, "a wholesome man" (ish tam), was formed entirely from ten (yod) pure bloods, and yod times dam (blood) comes to tam (ת"ם). Esav is called met (dead), because he was formed from the evil of the ten bloods; see there. Therefore it was necessary that they be twins, so that

Yaakov would draw to his formation all the good, and Esav would draw to himself all the evil from the bloods.

This is the meaning of "from your womb they shall be separated": that is to say, through your womb they will be separated, this one to his righteousness and that one to his wickedness. Because there is such opposition in one womb, two opposites from one extreme to the other, she is compelled to suffer that pain.

But she should not say that her prayer caused it. Understand all this well.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)