חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

BERDITCHEV · TOLDOT, KEDUSHAT LEVI

Why did Rivkah's painful pregnancy make her feel unworthy?

Kedushat Levi

Drawing on the Ari's teaching that righteous women are spared the pains of pregnancy and birth, the Kedushat Levi explains that Rivkah's distress led her to fear she was not worthy, since a person who is not good cannot host holiness. G-d reassured her that she was righteous and that her suffering came from the two nations in her womb, who were in opposition to one another. AI SUMMARY

Genesis 25,22. she said: “if so (that the children already quarrel within my womb) ,what is the purpose of my existence?” We can understand this complaint of Rivkah on the basis of a comment by the Ari’zal that righteous women are spared the pain and discomfort of pregnancy. Rivkah, while experiencing even more than the normal amount of pain and discomfort during her pregnancy, had concluded that this was proof that G’d had not considered her righteous.

Moreover, it is a tenet of our faith that if someone is not a “good” person, such a person will not serve as a receptacle for anything holy or potentially holy. Our sages have based this insight on Leviticus 11,15 את כל עורב למינו, “and every subspecies of raven each according to its species” (is forbidden to eat). [The word כל in that verse means that even close association with something ritually unclean, i.e. a raven, is an obstacle to such a person hosting holy spirit, etc. Ed.

] According to Bereshit Rabbah 63,6 whenever Rivkah passed a Torah academy Yaakov would make an effort to leave her womb, whereas when she passed a pagan temple Esau would try to leave her womb. Thereupon she went to ask G’d about this strange phenomenon. The Midrash states further that the word זה in our verse refers to the fact that originally, -if not for her complaint- Rivkah was slated to become the mother of all the twelve tribes; seeing that she appeared to find fault with G’d’s arrangement, she was told that she would become the mother of only two sons, one of whom would be Esau.

One of the sages in the Midrash takes issue with the literal meaning of Yaakov and Esau respectively having shown awareness of when their mother passed a Torah academy or a pagan temple, and states that, of course, this is merely a simile, and that Rivkah consulted with the heads of the academy founded by Shem and subsequently headed by his great grandson Ever.

According to another opinion offered, Rivkah knew that the source of holiness is the One known as אנכי, and when she exclaimed למה זה אנכי, she expressed her confusion how she could be the receptacle of a son who clearly strived for holiness if she was not worthy. On the other hand, if she were worthy, why did she experience such a difficult pregnancy? G’d put her mind at rest, telling her that her difficulties did not mean that she was not worthy, but that the other son who would be unworthy was the one that caused her present problems.

