חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

UJHELY · YISMACH MOSHE, TOLDOT

Why must good and evil grow side by side?

Yismach Moshe

Drawing on Rashi's and the Midrash's accounts of the twins' struggle at the entrances of Torah and idolatry, the author explains Rivkah's question, "If so, why am I?", by arguing that Yaakov and Esav were each born inclined toward their own path, but their intermingling in the womb gave each a real contest, so that each could freely choose and stand his ground. He concludes that G-d deliberately planted a good foundation alongside its opposite, since free choice cannot exist without an opposing force. AI SUMMARY

"The children struggled within her, and she said, 'If so, why am I thus?'" etc. (Bereshit 25:22). We have already written about this several times above. There is another way to explain it. Because of the struggling, she thought that, G-d forbid, both of them were wicked and quarrelsome, "estranged, the wicked, from the womb." So she said: Granted that Yitzchak is commanded to be fruitful and multiply, but I, why do I need this? That is the meaning of "If so, why am I?"

This is like the explanation of the verse "A wise son makes a father glad, and a foolish son is the grief of his mother" (Mishlei 10:1), precisely so: the father wants to do what he was commanded, etc., but the mother, why does she have a foolish son? She is not commanded to be fruitful and multiply.

And they answered her: "Two nations" etc. "and two peoples shall separate from your innards," this one to his wickedness and this one to his integrity, and one of them is a tzaddik (righteous one). Understand this.

There is another explanation, according to pshat (the plain meaning), based on what Rashi explains (the passage beginning) "Vayitrotzetzu" (Bereshit 25:22): when she passed the entrances of Torah, Yaakov struggled to come out, and at the entrances of idolatry, Esav struggled. Therefore she said, "If so," if this is the nature of tzaddikim and the nature of the wicked, "why am I" singled out in this? Surely tzaddikim and wicked people have already existed in the world, and nothing like this was heard. Therefore "she went to inquire," etc.

But the answer to this is by reasoning: this one is the holy source, the quarry of the whole nation, whose bed was perfect, and such great holiness is fitting to be aflame; and that one is a source of impurity, from whom nearly all the wicked of the earth are destined to arise. Other tzaddikim and wicked people are different. This is "And Hashem said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb,'" that is, two sources for two nations, and "knowledge is easy for one who understands": this one is the source of the supernal, holy nation, and that one is the source of the impure nation, the father of the fathers of impurity. And the question "why am I" no longer troubles us, for here it is different, as we said.

Another way appears to explain "If so, why am I?" (Bereshit 25:22). I heard in a dream (the night of the 11th of Tevet) that although Yaakov was born in goodness, inclined toward the good, as they said (Bereshit Rabbah 63:6) that he struggled in his mother's womb at the entrances of synagogues and study houses, and Esav was born in evil, inclined toward evil, as they said that he struggled in his mother's womb at the entrances of idolatry, then it would seem that they were almost deprived of free

choice. But the essence of their exercise of choice was this: because they were twin brothers in their mother's womb, they had an intermingling. So Esav, inclining toward evil with powerful desire, draws Yaakov along with him, and the reverse with Yaakov. Thus a strengthening of choice was enough for each one, so that each stood his ground. Until here I heard in a dream.

Now I too, in my dream then, said to explain the verse in Malachi (1:2-3) accordingly: "'I have loved you,' says Hashem. But you say, 'How have You loved us?' Is not Esav Yaakov's brother? Yet I love Yaakov, and Esav I hated." Until here. For the essence of the love sprouted from the holy forefathers, as they explain the verse "Only in your fathers did Hashem delight" (Devarim 10:15). From Avraham came Yishmael, and from Yitzchak came Esav; only an old father caused love for Israel. The question "How have You loved us?" is like "How shall I know" that Avraham said (Bereshit 15:8), which they expounded (Bereshit Rabbah 44:14) as "by what merit." That is to say: since it is the nature of the good to do good, why all this? And what did the tzaddik accomplish? To this He answered: "Is not Esav Yaakov's brother?" and they had an intermingling, and nevertheless this one separated to his integrity and that one to his wickedness, and because of this, "I love Yaakov, and Esav I hated." (Until here I said in the dream.)

Now according to this it appears that He, may He be blessed, had a deep intention in this matter. For it is impossible to plant the planting of Hashem, "in which to be glorified," except through a good foundation, but then he would be deprived of free choice, and this too is not good. Therefore Esav was born with him. Understand this.

This is what the verse says: "The children struggled within her," as Rashi explains, when she was passing, etc. "And she said, 'If so,'" that this is their nature while still in their mother's womb, which shows that they have no free choice and are not fit for reward and punishment, "why am I?" That is, why were they formed in a woman's womb? Hashem, may He be blessed, should have created them, or sent "a watcher and a holy one from heaven," and opposite him, from the power of the sitra achra (the "other side").

"And she went to inquire of Hashem. And Hashem said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb,'" that is, two sources, this one holy and that one the opposite, and both of them in the womb intermingle with each other. "And two peoples shall separate from your innards," this one to his wickedness and this one to his integrity.

"And one people shall be stronger than the other" etc., that is, each one draws from his fellow. Therefore "shall be stronger" means that he will need to overcome with his might and his choice in order to stand his ground. This is as I explained, "Is not Esav Yaakov's brother?" etc. Thus both of them have free choice, for this one the might of his choice is because of that one, and for that one because of this one. Understand this, for it is very correct and precisely aimed in the language of the holy Torah.

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