

Parashat Toledot: Why Do I Exist?

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Bereishit 25:21-22	
וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקֶרֶב רִיבְקָה וַתֹּאמֶר אִם-כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי וַתֵּלֶךְ לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת-יְהוָה:	But the children struggled in Rivka's womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of GOD,

1. Why Do I Exist?

Rashi on Bereishit 25:22	
וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן. גְּדוֹל צַעַר הָעֵבוֹר. לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי. מִתְאַוָּה וּמִתְפַּלֵּלָה עַל הָרִיוּן:	And she said, "If the pain of pregnancy be so great, why is it that I longed and prayed to become pregnant?" (Genesis Rabbah 63:6).

Ibn Ezra on Bereishit 25:22	
...והיא שאלה לנשים שילדו אם ארע להם ככה, ותאמרנה לא: וטעם ותאמר אם כן . הדבר והמנהג, למה זה אני בהריון משונה:	...Rivka asked women who had children if they had had a similar experience. They responded that they did not. Rivka then said, <i>if it</i> , namely, the manner and custom of pregnancy, <i>be so</i> as they said, <i>wherefore do I</i> undergo such an abnormal pregnancy.

Ramban on Bereishit 25:22	
וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי אִם כֵּן גְּדוֹל צַעַר הָעֵבוֹר לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי מִתְפַּלֵּלָה וּמִתְאַוָּה עַל הָרִיוּן, לָשׂוֹן רֶשֶׁ"י (רש"י על בראשית כ"ה:כ"ב), וְאֵינִי נִכּוֹן. וְרַבִּי אֲבִרָהָם אָמַר (אבן עזרא על בראשית כ"ה:כ"ב) כִּי שָׁאֲלָה אֶת הַנָּשִׁים אִם אָרַע לָהֶם כֵּכָה, וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה לֹא, וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן הַדָּבָר וְהַמְנַהֵג לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי בְּהָרִיוֹן מְשֻׁנָּה. וְהִנֵּה הַפְּתוּב חָסֵר וְאֵינִי שֶׁלֵּם בִּפְרוּשׁ הַזֶּה. וְהַנִּכּוֹן בְּעֵינֵי כִי אֲמַרָה אִם כֵּן יִהְיֶה לִי, לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי בְּעוֹלָם, הַלּוֹא אֵינִי שְׂאֵמוֹת אוֹ שְׂלֹא הֵייתִי, כְּטַעַם "כְּאִשֶּׁר לֹא הֵייתִי אֲהֵיָה" (איוב י"ט):	And she said, "If so, why do I exist?": "If the pain of pregnancy is so great, <i>lamah zeh anochi</i> (why did I) pray for and aspire to pregnancy?" Thus Rashi. But it is not correct. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra says that she asked the women if they had experienced such pains, and they said, "No," whereupon she said, "If the matter and custom of pregnancy be as they said, <i>lamah zeh anochi</i> , why am I beset with an unusual pregnancy?" According to this exposition, the verse is missing and incomplete. The correct interpretation, in my opinion, is that she said, "If it shall be so with me, <i>lamah zeh anochi</i> , [why am I in the world]? Would that I did not exist, that I should die or never have come into existence." This is similar to the verse, <i>I should have been as though I had not been</i> .

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

Seforno on Bereishit 25:22	
<p>ותאמר אם כן. אחרי שהדבר כן שמתרוצצין ויש לחוש שימות אחד מהם ואסתכן אני בלידה כמנהג בלידת עובר מת. למה זה אנכי. למה זה התאוו קרובי שאהיה אני אם הזרע באמרם את היי לאלפי רבבה וכן בעלי שהתפלל עלי בזה:</p>	<p>And she said: After it is a fact that these fetuses already are at each other's throats, I have reason to be afraid that one of them will die so that I endanger myself by giving birth to them, causing one of them to be stillborn. "Why do I exist?" Why were my relatives so concerned that it would be I who provide the seed for Yitzchok when they said רבבה לאלפי רבבה את, "may it be you who will be the source of millions." (24,60) Also, why did my husband insist that I become the mother of his children?</p>

Hizkuni on Bereishit 25:22	
<p>אם כן גדול צער העיבור למה זה אנכי קיימת בחיים נוח לי שאמות מיד ולא אסבול עוד צער הריון ולידה.</p>	<p>If so, "if there is so much pain involved in pregnancy, why do I have to remain alive?" I prefer to die immediately and avoid suffering the pains of pregnancy and birth.</p>

Keli Yakar on Bereishit 25:22	
<p>ויתרוצצו הבנים בקרבה וגו'. רציה זו היה שבעברה על פתח ביהמ"ד של שם ועבר יעקב מפרנס לצאת ועשו מעכב ע"י, ובעברה על פתח ע"ג עשו מפרנס לצאת ויעקב מעכב על ידו, והיא סברה שאין הדבר כן אלא וולד אחד בבטנה ורוצה לצאת בין לפתחי בתי מדרשות בין לפתח ע"ג וא"כ ח"ו שמא שתי רשויות יש, לפיכך אמרה למה זה אנכי כי כמוני כשאר נשים עובדי ע"ג ומה יתרון יש לי עליהם אם ח"ו שתי רשויות יש, לפיכך ותלך לדרוש את ה' ר"ל לדרוש אחר מציאת ה' ממש מהו.</p>	<p>"The children agitated within her..." This agitation happened when she would pass by the entrance of the Beit ha-Midrash of Shem and Ever. Yaakov struggled to come out, and Esav grasped his hand. And when she would pass by the entrance of the house of idols, Esav struggled to come out, and Yaakov grasped his hand. But she did not reason out the matter this way, but rather that she had only one fetus in her belly, that wanted to come out whether for a beit midrash or for a house of idols. If true, chas v'shalom, perhaps there are two authorities in existence! Therefore, she said, "why am I thus?", if I am just like all the other women who worship idols? What advantage do I have over them if, chas v'shalom, there are two authorities in existence? Therefore, "she went to inquire of ha-Shem," meaning, to inquire after the existence of God and God's essence.</p>

2. Rebecca's Encounter with God

Dr. Judy Klitsner, <i>Subversive Sequels in the Bible</i> , 143-144	
<p>Perhaps encouraged by Isaac's love and by his inclusion of her in his prayers, Rivka initiates an encounter with God that breaks the mold of godly exclusion cast by both Sarah and the Ishah [Eve] of the Garden of Eden...For the first and only time in the annals of Genesis, God delivers a verbal response to a woman in need...But Rivka's prophetic interlude proves to be an isolated experience for her. Following this encounter, she will not meet God again. Thus, this portion of Rivka's story is only a temporary digression from a growing move toward greater marginalization.</p>	
Dr. Malka Zeiger Simkovich, "Parashat Toledot: Rebecca's Character," TheTorah.com	
<p>Rebecca's legacy in early Jewish interpretation, it seems, depended largely on the degree to which interpreters believed that her womanhood made her unavoidably secondary to her husband, Isaac, in leadership.</p>	