

Rebekah's Pregnancy and birth of twins Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25)

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת יִצְחָק בְּרֵאֲבָרָה אֲבִרְהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק :

These are the descendents of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac.

וַיְהִי יִצְחָק בְּרֵאֲרַבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּקַחְתּוֹ אֶת־רִבְקָה בִּתְּבֹאֵל הָאֲרָמִי מִפָּדָן אֲרָם
אֵחֹת לָבָן הָאֲרָמִי לֹאִשָּׁה :

Isaac [*Yitzhak*] was forty years old when he took Rebekah [*Rivkah*],
daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram,
sister of Laban the Aramean
to himself as a wife.

וַיַּעֲתֵר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לְנִכְח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הִוא וַיַּעֲתֵר לֹא יְהוָה וַתֵּהָר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ :

Isaac implored God on behalf of his wife, because she was barren;
and God was implored by him, and his wife Rebekah conceived.

וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתִּלְדָּ לְדָרֹשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה :

And the children struggled [*yit-rotzetzu*] within her [*b'kirbah*];
and she said, "If so, why this I?" [*im ken lamah zeh anochi*].
She went to seek God.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לָּהּ שְׁנֵי גַיִם [גוֹיִם] בְּבֶטְנֶךָ וּשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעַד וַיִּפְרְדּוּ
וְלֹאִם מְלֹאִם יֵאָמָר וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר :

And God said to her:

"Two nations are in your belly; two peoples shall separate from your bowels.

One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."

וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לֵלְדֹת וְהִנֵּה תוֹמֵם בְּבֶטְנָה :

When her days to birth were filled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

וַיֵּצֵא הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוֹנִי כֻלּוֹ כְּאֲדָרֶת שֵׁעָר וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו :

The first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle [*k'aderet sei-ar*] all over;
so they named him Esau.

וַאֲחֵרֵי־כֵן יֵצֵא אָחִיו וְיָדוֹ אֲחִזָּת בְּעֵקֶב עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב
וַיִּצְחָק בְּרִשְׁשֵׁים שָׁנָה בְּלֵדֹת אֲתָם :

Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel [*eikev*] of Esau;
so they named him Jacob [*Yaakov*].

Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

RaSHI (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, Troyes France 1040-1105CE)

(כב) ויתלצצו. על פרחוד המקרא הנה אומר דרשני, שפסחם מה היא רציצה זו, וכתב "אם כן למה זה אנכי".
רבתינו דרשוהו לשון ריצה,

כשהיתה עוברת על פתחי תורה של שם ועבר יעקב רץ ומפרכס לצאת, עוברת על פתחי עבודת אלילים עשו מפרכס לצאת (ב"ר שם ו).
דבר אחר, מתרועעים זה עם זה ומריבים בנחלת שני עולמות (ילק"ש קי):
ותאמר אם כן. גדול צער העבור: למה זה אנכי. מתאנה ומתפללת על הריון:
ותלך לדרש. לבית מדרשו של שם (תרגום יונתן) [ועבר] (ב"ר שם): לדרש את ה'. שיגיד לה מה תהא בסופה:

v. 22 and they wrestled/ran [vayitrotzetzu]

You are forced to say that this text says "interpret me!!!"

For it concealed the meaning of this *r'tzitzah*

And wrote: "If so, why this I...?"

Our rabbis interpreted it as "running/*ritzah*".

When she would pass by the doors of the Torah of Shem and Ever, Jacob would run and jump about to get out.

When she would pass by the openings of *avodah zarah/ idolatry*,

Esau would jump to get out. (*Breishit Rabbah* 63:6)

Another interpretation: they were struggling/*mitrotzetzim* with each other,
contesting over the inheritance of the two worlds. (*Yalkut Shimoni* 110)

and she said "if so...?" The pain of pregnancy is so great...

Why this I? Why did I yearn and pray to conceive?

And she went to seek... To the Bet Midrash of Shem and Ever (*Breishit Rabbah* 63:6)

To seek God. That He should tell her what would happen to her in the end

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (Spain, France, England 1089-1167)

והיא שאל' לנשים שילדו אם אירע להם ככה ותאמרנה לא

וטעם ותאמר אם כן. הדבר והמנהג למה זה אנכי בהריון משונה

She asked the women who had given birth if it had been that way for them, and they said "no".

And the meaning of

And she said, "If so,..." If this is the typical way,

Why this I? Why am I in a different kind of pregnancy?"

RaMBaN (Rabbi Mosheh ben Nachman, Gerona Spain, 1194-1270)

ותאמר אם כן למה זה אנכי

אם כן גדול צער העבור למה זה אנכי מתפללת ומתאוה על ההריון לשון רש"י ואיננו נכון ורבי אברהם אמר כי שאלה את הנשים אם אירע להם ככה ותאמרנה לא ותאמר אם כן הדבר והמנהג למה זה אנכי בהריון משונה והנה הכתוב חסר ואיננו שלם בפירוש הזה והנכון בעיני כי אמרה אם כן יהיה לי למה זה אנכי בעולם הלואי אינני שאמות או שלא הייתי כטעם כאשר לא הייתי אהיה (איוב י"ט) "ותלך לדרוש את ה'" - לשון רש"י להגיד מה יהא בסופה ולא מצאתי דרישה אצל ה' רק להתפלל כטעם דרשתי את ה' וענני (תהלים לד ה) דרשוני וחיו (עמוס ה ד) חי אני אם אדרש לכם (יחזקאל כ ג)

She said: "If so why this I?"

"If the pain of pregnancy is so great, why did I yearn and pray to conceive".

This is RaSHI's language, and it is not correct.

Rabbi Abraham [ibn Ezra] says that

she asked the women if they had experienced the same,
and they said "no," so she said "if this is not the usual way,
then why am I in a different kind of pregnancy?"

But if this is the interpretation, then the verse is lacking and incomplete.

The correct interpretation in my opinion is that she said:

"if it is going to be this way for me, then why am I in the world?

I wish I would not be, that I would die, or that I would never have come into existence,
as in the verse "I should have been as though I never had been" (Job 10:19).

And she went to seek [lidrosh] God

RaSHI says "that he would tell her what would be in her end."

But I have never found *d'risha* of God except in reference to prayer, as in:

I sought [darashtij] God and He answered me (Ps 34:5)

Seek me [dirshuni] and live (Amos 5:4)

"As I live", says God the Eternal, "I will not be sought [idaresh] by you." (Ezekiel 20:3)

Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno (Italy 1475-1550)

ותאמר אם כן אחרי שהדבר כן שמתרוצצין

ויש לחוש שימות אחד מהם ואסתכן אני בלידה כמנהג בלידת עובר מת.

And she said, "If so...."

Since it is a fact that they (the fetuses) are struggling,

and there is reason to fear that one of them will die and that I will be endangered in childbirth,
as is often the case with a stillbirth.

למה זה אנכי. למה זה התאוה קרובי שתהיה אני אם הזרע באמרם את היי לאלפי רבבה
וכן בעלי שהתפלל עלי בזה:

Why this I?

Why were my family so longing for me to be with seed, in saying:

"Our daughter, may you be the mother of a thousand ten thousands" (Genesis 24:60),

and also my husband, that he prayed over me for this?

[commenting on RaMBaN's interpretation]

Essentially, Job's anguish and his quest originate in Rebecca's. She is the first human being to have sought out God. The pain that threatens to tear her apart seems to signify some destructive conflict raging in that secret place within her. A new desire moves her: not simply for the oracular answer, but for the God who will hear and even vindicate her question. For, after all, her experience of the problem of natality is of a different order than Job's. If he represents the human strangeness of being born from a woman's belly, Rebecca's relation to that belly, that womb, is more complex. For she *is* the womb, the belly the entrails. She not only questions her natal condition, but *is* the body in which human life uncannily originates.