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Toldot

But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of Hashem. And Hashem answered her, "Two nations are in your womb, two separate peoples shall issue from your body. One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."

(Gen. 25:22-23)

This week's parsha opens with the story of Yitzchak and Rivka's prayers for offspring. They are answered, and Rivka conceives. It isn't long before Rivka feels strange. The twins in her womb are restless, and she is in terrible discomfort. She asks "Why do I exist?" The Midrash explains her existential angst by telling us that when Rivka would pass a house of idolatry, she would feel the pressure of Esav attempting to run toward it. When she passed a beis midrash, she would feel Yaakov trying to do the same. She opens her heart in prayer once again in search of understanding.

Hashem explains to Rivka (via prophecy) that the two children she is expecting represent dramatically opposed worldviews. Their rivalry will last throughout history. This is the explanation for the turmoil she feels. What remains unclear is: how does this assuage Rivka's feelings? If anything, it should have only deepened her distress.

The Tiferes Shlomo (R. Shlomo Rabinowicz of Radomsk, 1801-1866) explains that in fact, Rivka had not known that she was expecting twins. When she felt the contradictory urges within her body, she feared that the child in her womb was neither good nor evil. Far worse: she thought that she was carrying a child who was wishy-washy. Often, the Radomsker explains, we encounter moments of spiritual uplift, and we are inspired. It doesn't take long before we slip right back to where we were,
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though. We forget our focused davening that morning at Shacharis or the fascinating Torah class we attended on Wednesday night. Our attention reverts to the pursuit of vanity and nonsense.

The Radomsker says that the only path to true growth is to be “all in.” It is impossible to achieve anything in life by only devoting some of our attention to it. This is why when Rivka was informed that she was destined to bear two children of opposing natures, she was relieved! At least her child would not do things by half-measures.

I do not know anyone who has got to the top without hard work. That is the recipe. It will not always get you to the top, but should get you pretty near.

- Margaret Thatcher

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Asher Coleman

