

Toldot davar Torah

By Deb Platek

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Shabbat Shalom.

My name is Deb Platek.

I am an OB/GYN who deals with High Risk pregnancies and it will be become more apparent as I speak why that is relevant to this drash.

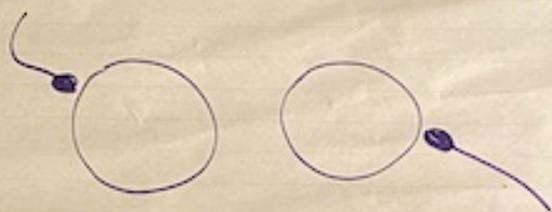
Toldot is the story of Rebecca's pregnancy and the birth of her twins and every year I cringe when this story is told because of the medical inaccuracies of this story.

Here is where I will use a visual aid:.

(See below-picture of di/di and mono/di pregnancies)

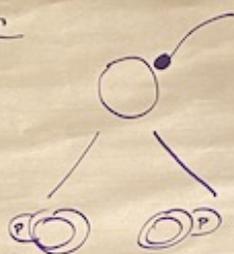
TWINS

Dizygotic
(Fraternal)

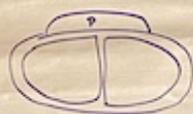


Diamniotic
Dichorionic

Monozygotic
(Identical)



0-3d



3-5d



5-8d

Conjoined

>8d

It is interesting that the Talmud expresses an understanding of the source of twinning. In Yebamot 98- in a discussion of paternity, the Talmud states that the mechanism of the development of twin brothers

is: "דטפה אחת היה ונחלקה לשתיים" - "there was one drop of semen that split into two"

The Rabbis were probably familiar with Aristotle's work in 4th century that postulated twins were caused by too much semen. In the thirteenth century the German theologian Albertus Magnus updated this theory, and suggested that twins were generated when the woman experienced too much sexual pleasure during intercourse which redistributed the seed throughout the uterus, resulting in twins.

It is clear from the text that Jacob and Esau are not identical twins.

Jacob and Esau are clearly different by both outward appearance as well as personality traits. Esau is ruddy and hairy; Jacob is smooth-skinned. Although personality is not exclusively dictated by genetics, Esau is the hunter, boldly going off into the wilderness; Jacob is יושב אוהלים simple and more comfortable staying in his tent and cooking lentil stew.

Jacob's name יעקב is acquired because he was born holding on to his brother Esau's heel his עקב

So here is the part that bothers me- If indeed Esau and Jacob were dizygotic twins, each with their own amniotic and chorionic membranes- there is no way that Jacob could have been emerged holding the ankle of his twin.

In addition, mechanically twins just would not be deliverable from that presentation (other than by cesarean delivery)

We know that this was not a cesarean delivery because women in 1800 BCE did not survive cesarean delivery and we know that there is much more Rebecca coming in this story.

Traditionally when there is conflict within a Biblical story, our sages use this as an opportunity to find meaning in the text other than what is written there- either as an example or metaphor

For me, Jacob hanging onto Esau trying to "drag him back in" is the most primal representation of sibling rivalry.

The Torah is rife with examples of sibling rivalry, from Cain and Abel through to Moses and Aaron.

The only Biblical brothers who are not reported to have a contentious relationship are Joseph's sons Menashe and Ephraim that is why we bless our sons with the words: "May Gd make you like Ephraim and Manasseh- the wish that all parents have that their children will get along

But back to Jacob and Esau

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks comments that the key to understanding the relationship between Jacob and Esau's story is to recognize Jacob's mimetic desire: the desire to have what someone else has, because they have it.

In this parsha Jacob barter with his brother for his birthright, disguises himself in his brother's clothes and at his mother's request, takes his brother's blessing. When asked by his father, "Who are you, my son?" he lies to his father outright twice and says "אנכי עשב בבורק" "I am Esau, your firstborn."

Jacob was the man who wanted to be Esau. But why?

Rabbi Sacks contends that Esau had the one thing that Jacob did not have- his father's love. We know this because the Torah tells us "ויאהב יצחק את עשו" "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob." Jacob envied what Esau has and found himself lacking.

All this changes in the great wrestling match between Jacob and the stranger, the angel in disguise that we will read in פרשת וישלך . After they fight, the angel tells Jacob that his name would now be Yisrael. The stated explanation of this name is: "for you have wrestled with God and with man and you have prevailed."

With his new name he is no longer chasing after his brother's ankles, no longer bogged down by envy of his brother and a childish desire to be someone other than himself.

It is only after he embraces this new version of himself -someone who can wrestle with God and man and prevail, that he can then move on in his life, make peace with his brother to become the founding father of a nation and fulfill the destiny promised to our forefathers

(target) Another area where the Talmud talks about conception is in Niddah, 31a. This does not relate specifically to twins, but I think it is beautiful. In Niddah 31a it says

תנו רבנן שלשה שותפין יש באדם הקב"ה ואביו ואמו. אביו מזריע הלובן...אמו מזרעת...
אדם... והקב"ה נותן בו רוח ונשמה וקלסתר פנים

Our Rabbis taught: There are three partners in the creation of a person, the Holy One, blessed be He, the father and the mother. The father supplies the white...the mother supplies the red...and the Holy One, blessed be He, supplies the spirit and the breath and the beauty...