

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Vayeshev  
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פרשת וישב  
כ"א בכסלו תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 37:1-40:23

In this *parasha*, Yosef's dreams anger his brothers, and they sell him into slavery in Egypt, where he eventually ends up in prison, still interpreting others' dreams.

Most of us recognize the names of the most famous twins in the Torah: Yaakov and Esav. In chapter 38, we encounter a second set of twins, which many people have never heard of: Peretz and Zerach, the sons of Yehuda, Yaakov's third son. Here is the account of their birth (verses 27-30):

כז וַיְהִי בַעַת לִדְתָהּ וְהִנֵּה תְאוּמִים בְּבֶטְנָהּ: כח וַיְהִי בְלִדְתָהּ וַיִּתְּוֹךְ וַתִּקַּח הַמִּלְדָּת וַתִּקְשֶׁר עַל־יָדוֹ שְׁנֵי לְאָמֵר זֶה יֵצֵא רֵאשִׁיטָהּ: כט וַיְהִי כַּמְשִׁיב יָדוֹ וְהִנֵּה יֵצֵא אַחִיו וַתֹּאמֶר מִה־פְּרִצָתָ עַל־יָד פְּרִץ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פְּרִץ: ל וְאַחַר יֵצֵא אַחִיו אֲשֶׁר עַל־יָדוֹ הַשְּׁנֵי וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ זֶרַח:

**27** And it came to pass in the time that she was giving birth, that, behold, twins were in her womb. **28** And it came to pass, when she was giving birth, that one put out a hand; and the midwife took and tied upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying: 'This one came out first.' **29** And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold his brother came out; and she said: 'Why have you made a breach [Peretz] for yourself?' Therefore he called his name Peretz. **30** And afterward his brother came out, the one that had the scarlet thread upon his hand; and he called his name Zerach.

Peretz became the ancestor of King David, as outlined at the end of *Megillat Rut*, the Book of Ruth:

וְאַלְהַ תּוֹלְדוֹת פְּרִץ, פְּרִץ הוֹלִיד אֶת-חֶצְרוֹן: וְחֶצְרוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת-רָם, וְרָם הוֹלִיד אֶת-עַמִּינָדָב: וְעַמִּינָדָב הוֹלִיד אֶת-נַחֲשׁוֹן, וְנַחֲשׁוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת-שְׁלֹמֹה:

וְשִׁלְמוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת-בְּעֹז, וּבְעֹז הוֹלִיד אֶת-עֹבֵד: וְעֹבֵד הוֹלִיד אֶת-יִשָּׂי, וְיִשָּׂי  
הוֹלִיד אֶת-דָּוִד.

Now these are the generations of Peretz: Peretz begot Chetzron; and Chetzron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadav; and Amminadav begot Nachshon, and Nachshon begot Salmon; and Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Oved; and Oved begot Yishai, and Yishai begot David.

There must be some underlying meaning to this story of one brother—Zerach—putting out his hand and the other brother—Peretz—being born first. Ramban [13<sup>th</sup> Century Spain/Palestine] offers an intriguing suggestion. He says:

In the *Midrash* of Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakanah, he mentions a secret in the names of the newborns. They called Zerach [literally, ‘shines’] for the sun that shines in a constant way every single day and Peretz [literally, ‘breach’] for the moon which wanes [breaches] sometimes and grows larger sometimes. And Peretz is the first born but the sun is bigger [Zerach] than the moon...and he was named after the moon because of the monarchy of the house of David which kept coming back after it was breached. This is why, as mentioned in Tractate Rosh Hashana, when the new moon of the month is publicly announced, the people respond, “דוד מלך ישראל חי וקיים” – David, the king of Yisrael, is alive and well.”

Ramban connects the births of these twins to the future everlasting kingdom of the house of David. The moon, of course, draws its light from the sun. According to Ramban, this is the meaning of Zerach putting out his hand first: that the two brothers worked in sync with each other, with the moon, Peretz, the ancestor of both David and the Messiah, depending on his “younger” brother, Zerach, the sun.

Of course, this is all Midrash and is not immediately apparent in the text. Nonetheless, it is comforting to see these twin brothers getting along even when there is a question as to birth order, in contrast to the previous twin brothers, who experienced a great deal of strife based on the conflict about who would receive the birthright. This second story should give us hope that people do make progress in relationships over the course of human history.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- If Zerach put his hand out first, is Peretz actually the firstborn, or should it be Zerach? Why?
- Why might we want to know David's (and therefore the Messiah's) entire lineage back to Yaakov and Yehuda? What difference does it make?