

## Parshas Toldos - Learning in the Womb

Although ultrasounds are commonplace today, ultrasound technology didn't get its official start in medicine until the late 1950s. Professor Ian Donald, who was the Chair of Midwifery at Glasgow University, started researching the use of sonography to catch a glimpse inside the human body. In 1958, Dr. Donald, together with his colleagues Dr. John McVicar and technician Tom Brown, published the now famous Lancet medical research paper, and ushered in a new era of medical technology. While Dr. Donald's research is commonly credited as the starting point for ultrasound's introduction to the practice of medicine and OB/GYN practices, the seed was sown for this medical breakthrough in the 19th and 20th century by scientists such as Thomas Young, Christian Doppler, and Jacque and Pierre Curie.

Let's take a look at what the Torah and Chazal say about the baby in the embryo:

	<b>פרק כה פסוק כב:</b>
But the children struggled in her womb	וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקֶרֶבָּהּ
	<b>רש"י:</b>
Our Rabbis explain that the word וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ has the meaning of running, moving quickly: whenever she passed by the doors of the Torah (i. e. the Schools of Shem and Eber) Jacob moved convulsively in his efforts to come to birth, but whenever she passed by the gate of a pagan temple Esau moved convulsively in his efforts to come to birth	<b>וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ</b> - רבותינו דרשוהו לשון ריצה; כשהיתה עוברת על פתחי תורה של שם ועבר יקרב רץ ומפרכס לצאת, עוברת על פתח עבודת אלילים, עשו מפרכס לצאת. דבר אחר מתרצצים זה עם זה ומריבים בנסלות שני עולמות.
<b>We see clearly from this source that babies hear sound from inside the womb</b>	

	<b>יבמות א:ו:</b>
He saw Rebbi Joshua and said to him: "To whom will one teach knowledge, I remember that his mother brought his crib to the Synagogue that his ears should cling to the words of the Torah."	וַיַּאֲהָ אֶת רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ. וְקָרָא עָלָיו אֶת מִי יוֹרֶה דִיעָה. זְכוֹר אֲנִי שֶׁהָיְתָה אִמּוֹ מוֹלֶכֶת עֲרִיסָתוֹ לְבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת בְּשִׁבְלֵי שִׁיתְדַּבְּקוּ אָזְנוֹ בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה
<b>We see clearly from this source that babies hear and learn while in the womb</b>	

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Harav Reuven Feinstein, shlit"א  
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	<b>משניות יומא ח:ה</b>
With regard to a pregnant woman who smelled food and was overcome by a craving to eat it, one feeds her until she recovers, as failure to do so could lead to a life-threatening situation.	עברה שהריחה, מאכילין אותה עד שתשיב נפשה.
	<b>רע"ב:</b>
<u>The fetus smells the scent of a cooked dish</u> and she desires it, but if she does not eat, both of them (i.e., the fetus and the mother) are endangered.	עוברה שהריחה - העובר מריח ריח התבשיל והיא מתאוה לו, ואם אינה אוכלת שניהם מסוכנים:
	<b>יומא פב:</b>
With respect to a pregnant woman who smells food, it is told: <b>A certain pregnant woman smelled food and craved it. Those involved came before Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi to ask how to proceed. He said to those who were inquiring: Go and whisper to her that today is Yom Kippur. They whispered to her, and this whispering helped; she stopped craving the food. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi read this verse about the baby she was carrying: "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you" (Yirmiah 1:5), and indeed, the baby who came out of that woman was Rabbi Yochanan.</b>	ההיא עוברה דארתא, אתו לקמיה דרבבי, אמר להו: זילו לחושו לה דיומא דכיפורי הוא. לחושו לה ואילחישא. קרי עליה: "בטרם אצרך בבטן ידעתוך וגו'".
<b>We see from this source that a baby smells when in the womb</b>	

Until 1963, science had no knowledge of any sort of learning that can be ascribed to the embryo while it is in the womb. Since then, a strong case has been made maintaining that the embryo learns and possesses some basic knowledge, and is affected primarily by music and speech. It appears however that all of the embryo's knowledge is forgotten before birth.

This idea is expressed by Rashi where he quotes the Medrash that says when Rivka passed the bais medrash Yaakov was kicking to come out, and Eisav was kicking when she passed the house of Avodah Zarah. Plus the Gemara recounts that pregnant women would sit outside the bais medrash so that the unborn children could benefit from hearing the sounds of Torah.

**Science is finally catching up with the Torah!**

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