

**Dvar Torah for Yesh Tikva Infertility Awareness Shabbat**

In this month of Nisan, we are reminded once again about the integral role children play in Judaism and its observance. The words we hear over and over again, והגדת לבנך , and you shall tell your children, can pierce like a dagger through the hearts of couples who struggle with infertility. They are a direct reminder of what these individuals want so desperately - a family - but are not able to have at the moment. . Those who experience infertility often feel like social outsiders, at least in some ways, especially in the family- and child-centered Jewish community. At best, they slip through the cracks; at worst, they endure many insensitive questions and comments from those who do not understand.

Infertility is defined as the inability to conceive after one year of trying for women under 35 or after six months for women over 35, or the inability to carry a pregnancy to live birth, and approximately 1 in 8 couples in the United States suffer from infertility. This Shabbat, we are partnering with Rabbi's in over 300 Synagogues in the USA, Canada and Israel to share a message with the hope of enhancing communal understanding and facilitate empathy for those who have not yet been blessed with children or who are struggling to expand their families.

But the commandment to recount the story of the exodus and to celebrate our freedom does not require having children. The Sages intended that everyone be an active participant at the Seder. The Rambam in Hilchot Chametz U’Matzah 7:1 points out “[The mitzvah to recount the exodus applies] even if one does not have a child.” The Rambam goes out of his way to mention the childless in order to reassure those who are not parents, or who may still be single, that they are not left out of this holiday.

One of the biggest challenges that couples face when they struggle to conceive is loneliness. That feeling that you’re the only one going through it can be hard to bear. At our synagogue we are blessed to have so many babies born in our community, and so many opportunities to celebrate, at brises for boys and simchat bats for girls. But for every baby that is born, there is at least one person in the room desperately wishing it was happening to them. For couples struggling with infertility, being in shul can be very painful.

So how can faith communities be more supportive? How can we be a more sensitive space that helps make those couples feel less alone? When we know that someone is suffering from something that we cannot fix, many of us react by disengaging, because we don’t know what to say.

You should all have received a document with phrases that couples that have been struggling with infertility have found helpful as well as those that have been found less helpful.

We shouldn't make assumptions about why someone may or may not have children, and we should invite people in all different life stages, not just families, to our homes for Shabbat meals.

As we all start to clean our homes for every speck of chametz that our children may have hidden in the couch or behind the bookcases, be careful not to complain in public. Realize that there are some who pray to have such problems. Though everyone is faced in life with his or her own struggles, being sensitive to one’s neighbor’s situation and being mindful of one’s speech and actions goes a long way in reducing embarrassment, stress and causing unnecessary pain.

This year, let us work extra hard on being sensitive to everyone in our community.

**Some other places to look:**

1. The Matriarchs

a. Sarah: Bereishit - Genesis (15-17)

b. Rivkah: Bereishit – Genesis (26:21) and Yebamot 64a

c. Rachel: Bereishit – Genesis (29:31)

d. Leah: Bereishit – Genesis (30:1-25) 2. The wife of Manoach: Judges (13:24-25)

3. Hannah: Samuel 1 (1-2), Berakoth 31b