



**RABBI GIDEON**

**Machon Puah for Fertility and  
Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha**

**WEITZMAN**

# Preserving the Land, Working the Land

Last week we asked the question as to whether fertility treatment, and, indeed many other branches of medicine, are considered to be playing God? While we have the capability of performing many fascinating and mind-boggling procedures, we may be well advised to limit our power, since we cease to be human beings working in God's world, and we become god-like ourselves, convincing ourselves of our own power and infallibility.

The Torah (Bereishit 2:15) tells us that Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden “to work it and to preserve it”. Preserving the Garden, and God's world, means ensuring that the world continues to function and does not disintegrate into total chaos. But “working” the world has a different emphasis, it refers to our obligation to develop the world, to create a better existence, to fight disease and enable the inhabitants of the world to have access to food and basic needs.

Does this injunction give us a free hand to whatever we as humans see fit within the framework of “working” the land? Can we use our intelligence and power to change the world through medical technology and advances in health?

The late Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt”l was asked whether a couple is permitted to use preimplantation diagnosis technology (PGD). This is usually used to eradicate genetic diseases and involves undergoing in-vitro fertilization and producing embryos in the laboratory. A cell, or a number of cells, are then removed and checked whether they contain a genetic disease. The embryos that contain the unwanted genetic condition can then be discarded and only those that are unaffected can be transferred in order to achieve a healthy pregnancy.

Rav Elyashiv gave a psak that this technology when used for a medical condition is permitted, but if used for cosmetic reasons then it is forbidden. This opens up the possibility of utilizing this important medical procedure and ensures that religious Jews will be able to have healthy children even if they themselves carry a serious genetic abnormality. If the couple want to use this technology for a non-essential purpose, such as choosing eye colour, or height, they would not be able to undergo PGD.

This makes a lot of sense and provides at least a partial answer to the question of playing God; we are permitted, and obligated, to prevent and treat disease. In this we become partners with the Almighty and “work” the world. However, if we decide which cosmetic qualities are desirable and which are not, that is playing God and is forbidden. More on this next week. ■