



## What is Cosmetic?

Last time we saw Rav Elyashiv's decision that preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) is permitted in cases of medical need, but is not allowed for cosmetic reasons. This suggests that when we fight, treat and prevent disease we become partners with God. However, using PGD for cosmetic purposes is forbidden. The rationale for this position is that we would decide which traits are desirable and which are undesirable, and this is extremely close to playing God. The Sages were interested in allowing access to medical treatment in order to promote health and healthy families. They did not want us to use medical advances in a reckless and careless manner.

However, this simple distinction and division is not as simple as it initially appears to be. Let us consider the following example; should we permit a couple to undergo PGD in order not to have a child who is a carrier of a genetic condition.

To explain the question, we must present a concise explanation of genetics. Genes are the map that determines how we will develop into human beings, which traits we will carry, what diseases and what genetic abnormalities. Everyone carries a

significant number of genetic abnormalities but, generally, these have no clinical significance. We can be carriers of recessive genetic diseases which will only express themselves as an actual disease if we marry someone who carries the same recessive genetic disease. In such a case, if both parents pass on the defective gene the child will be affected with the genetic disease, which could be a serious and even fatal condition.

Other genetic diseases are dominant, and are so "powerful" that one cannot be a carrier, if you have the defective gene you are ill with the disease. In such a case it is irrelevant who you marry, your children have a 50% chance of inheriting the disease and being sick.

Being a carrier in of itself is not a genetic disease. A couple marry and one of them is a carrier for Tay Sachs. Since the other spouse is not a carrier, their children will not be ill, but they may be carriers. The couple would like to undergo PGD to ensure that none of their children carry the disease. Is this permitted? In other words, is this case considered a medical need or is it cosmetic? The PGD does not eradicate a disease, and so appears to be cosmetic. On the other hand, the condition is a medical one and so it could be classified as a medical need. More on this next week. ■