



RABBI GIDEON

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

WEITZMAN

Choosing Traits

Last time we saw the Talmudic discussion between Rabbi Akiva and Turnus Rufus. The latter suggested that changing the world, even improving it, goes against the Divine plan. We must leave the world as it is and view God's plot unfold. Rabbi Akiva took a very different approach; we are obligated to improve the world and, in so doing, become active partners in the Divine plan. God wants us to "interfere", and help His children.

Of course, we follow Rabbi Akiva, and so this source suggests that we are obligated to utilize any medical advance that eases pain and suffering. We must develop medical procedures that will eradicate disease and promote health.

But this source does not set limits to such endeavors. Can we use any medical advance even when there are negative side effects and unwanted outcomes? Is all medicine "kosher" and every procedure permitted?

Clearly there must be limits to medical advance and the use of potentially harmful techniques. Who can set such limits? Who is warranted to make such decisions?

There is another problem with genetic testing of fertilized eggs; we create embryos

in the laboratory and remove genetic material, enabling us to run a scan and test the entire genetic makeup of the fertilized egg. Any embryo containing unwanted traits is discarded.

This raises a serious ethical question, based on our judgment of unwanted traits. Can we make a decision that certain genetic traits are unwanted and must be eradicated? When the unwanted trait is a potentially fatal disease it is medically warranted, and is intuitive that we seek to eradicate such a disease. It is also halachically permitted.

However, there are many cases that are not so clear cut and are not fatal diseases but unwanted traits. We have already discussed the case of a carrier of a recessive genetic abnormality. Who can decide that this is an unwanted trait?

This is beyond a medical question and it becomes a judgment call and an ethical issue. Can a couple decide that a particular trait is undesirable and they would like any embryo carrying this trait to be destroyed? Do patients have complete autonomy to make such decisions and undergo a medical procedure to eradicate such a trait?

Let us consider one example; gender selection. Can a couple decide that they would like to have a child of a particular gender, let us say a girl, and thus any male embryo is to be discarded?

More on this next time ■