



RABBI GIDEON

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

WEITZMAN

Concern For the Next Generation

Last time we explained the disagreement between Yeshayahu and Chizkiyahu. The Talmud relates how the prophet rebuked the king for refraining from procreating. When Chizkiyahu explained that he knew his children would be inappropriate, Yeshayahu answered that this was not the king's problem and that was up to the King of Kings. However, when Chizkiyahu suggested a plan to change the fateful outcome, Yeshayahu refused and declared that it was already determined. This incensed the king who threw him out, and proclaimed that a person must never give up. We suggested that their argument is based on whether we assume that all is predetermined or whether we have the capacity to change our fate.

Let us now relate this Talmudic piece to the question of choosing genetic traits for our children. A couple get married and discover that they both carry a recessive genetic abnormality. Since it is recessive both husband and wife are perfectly healthy, but they have a 25% chance of having a child with this genetic illness. One of the most famous cases is Tay Sachs,

a rare disease caused by the absence of an enzyme that helps break down fatty substances. These fatty substances, called gangliosides, build up to toxic levels in the brain and spinal cord and affect the function of the nerve cells.

In the most common and severe form of Tay-Sachs disease, signs and symptoms start to show up at about 3 to 6 months of age. As the disease progresses, development slows and muscles begin to weaken. Over time, this leads to seizures, vision and hearing loss, paralysis, and other major issues. Children with this form of Tay-Sachs disease typically live only a few years.

Fate has determined that one in four of their children (statistically speaking) will inherit this disease. We could ask whether such a couple are obligated to have children? They know that their children could be ill and live short and painful lives. According to Yeshayahu's injunction the answer seems to be clear; there is an obligation to have children irrespective of the fate of those children. The tragic outcome of this approach is that the parents will witness their children's suffering and early demise, and they will suffer along with them. So can we still encourage them, or even oblige them to have such children?

Modern medicine has given these parents the option of changing their fate.

More on this next time. ■