



RABBI GIDEON

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

WEITZMAN

Obligated to Have Healthy Children

Last time we discussed whether a couple who carry a genetic disease is obligated to undergo PGD in order to ensure that their children will not carry the same disease. On the one hand, it seems intuitive that the parents cannot bring a sick child into the world. We have an obligation to alleviate other people's suffering, as the verse states "love your neighbor as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18).

The Talmud (Shabbat 31a) explains the verse to mean that one should not do to others that which they would not want done to them. If I need to make a decision that would have ramifications for another person, I must assess what would I want to happen to me in that situation. Often it is

difficult to make such an assessment, and sometimes the best decision is inaction, what the Gemara calls "*shev ve'al ta'aseh*", choosing not to take any action, due to the inability to decide which is the best path of action.

However certain cases are much clearer, and the choice is much easier to make. I would definitely not want to be ill with a certain debilitating disease that would cause me to suffer throughout my life. People would not want to be born knowing that they would have a short and difficult life, filled with medical treatments and with no positive prognosis.

As such, if there is a good chance that the couple will have children with a serious congenital disease, the couple would be obligated to do whatever they can to ensure that the children would be healthy. This would appear to include the requirement to not have children in the regular manner, but only through preimplantation genetic diagnosis, PGD.

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When we asked many Rabbanim this question, there were poskim who were of the opinion that the couple are obligated to undergo PGD. Some were of the opinion that this is a case when there was a 50% chance of having a child with a genetic illness. In other words, if it is a dominant genetic abnormality, in which one of the parents is ill with the same disease and statistically half of their children will inherit the disease, the couple must do PGD. When dealing with a recessive genetic condition, in which both parents are carriers, and there is a 25% chance of having a child with the condition, those poskim did not think that it is imperative for the parents to undergo PGD. The reason is that most of their children will still be healthy.

More on this next time. ■

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