



RABBI GIDEON WEITZMAN

Machon Puah for Fertility and
Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha

Where is the Husband?

Last time we discussed Rabbi Yehuda Henkin's book *Bnei Banim* that is being translated into English.

One teshuva relates to the question of the husband's presence during childbirth. This is a relatively modern question, as in previous generations the husband did not participate in the birth at all. Women would deliver the baby at home, and later in a hospital setting, in the presence of a midwife, and not necessarily even a doctor. The husband was, at the most, outside the room and was informed of the birth after it was already over when the baby and his wife were fully dressed.

But times have changed and women want their husbands to be present and participate in the process of birth. Men also want to be more a part of the delivery of their children and assist their wives when necessary.

Rabbi Henkin discusses this question and raises the halachic problems. The halacha

requires a distinct separation between husband and wife during the times that the wife is impure. This separation includes not only physical contact but also seeing the required covered parts of his wife's body.

The process of birth renders a woman halachically impure due to the bleeding involved and the opening of the cervix due to the expulsion of the fetus. During birth the woman will be uncovered and the husband cannot look at various parts of her body, nor can he hold her due to the halachic limitations on touching at this point. As such, Rabbi Henkin writes that if the husband is not needed then he should not be present.

But the question becomes more relevant when the wife demands that he be present as this will calm her and encourage her, which will be an easier and more positive birth experience. In such a case, Rabbi Henkin examines the permission that the Rabbis gave to perform various acts to alleviate the woman's fear and concerns.

For example, the Gemara (Shabbat 128b) permits lighting a candle, even though the woman giving birth is blind and does not derive direct benefit from the light. The Rabbis permitted this since it will alleviate her fear that the midwife or attending physician will not be able to see clearly and will not be able to assist her as necessary. Even if the midwife claims that she can perform her task in the current light, since the woman would be calmer if the light was lit it is permitted.

More on this next time. ■

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