



RABBI GIDEON WEITZMAN

Machon Puah for Fertility and
Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha

Mutual Support

Last time we saw that Rabbi Henkin discussed the presence of the husband in the room when his wife gives birth. His responsa appears in his book, *Bnei Banim*, which is now being published in English, after having been translated by his wife, Rabbanit Chana Henkin, the acclaimed founder of *Nishmat*.

Rabbi Henkin points out that some poskim permitted doing certain acts in accordance with the woman giving birth's requests, but these must only be done in an unusual manner, called *shinui*. This implies that the woman giving birth is the same as any other ill person with the same set of halachot. Performing the act in an unusual way is necessary to decrease the halachic severity of the potentially forbidden action.

Rabbi Henkin disagrees with this position; he claims, as we saw last time, that the woman giving birth is a unique case. The Rabbis viewed her as needing the support and this is essential to enable her to survive the process of birth. The importance that the Rabbis and the halacha showed towards the woman giving birth's mental state and the need to ensure that she would remain as calm as possible and need not worry unnecessarily, is unique and unlike any other sick individuals.

This brings us back to the question of the husband's presence in the birthing room. Despite the halachic problems that can arise due to the wife's halachic status, that we have discussed previously, it would appear that the husband plays a vital role.

In many cases, the husband would be the perfect person to calm his wife and afford her the mental and psychological support that she needs at this critical time. Just his presence and her knowledge that he is there, can calm the wife and enable her to relax to some degree as she enters the final stages of delivery.

Rabbi Henkin in his responsa determines that if the husband plays no role in a particular case then he should remain outside the room. But if the wife requests that he attends the birth, not only is it permitted for him to do so, rather, it is an obligation. This is similar to the permissibility and obligation to light the candle on Shabbat when the woman makes such a request.

I would add that this has become the norm in many hospitals, and husbands and wives widely celebrate the moment of birth together. This is a blessing and they offer mutual support and encouragement. ■

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