



RABBI GIDEON WEITZMAN

Machon Puah for Fertility and
Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha

When the Miraculous Becomes Commonplace

Last time we saw that since the first baby, Louise Brown, was born through in-vitro fertilization, in 1978, over 13 million children have been born using this technology. IVF has become an extremely common and widely used procedure.

While it was seen as miraculous a few decades ago, it is considered as normal today. While newspaper cover stories on July 25th, 1978, claimed that Louise Brown was a “super-babe”, the babies born today after IVF are just like any other baby.

Sir Robert Edwards, the Nobel Prize winning scientist, who performed the first successful IVF, told me that in their first paper in the prestigious academic journal, Nature, they already claimed that this would change the world. He is quoted in newspapers of the day saying that he was confident that many other women would profit from their work. And, they were right. 13 million children later, IVF is the norm.

What impact does this have on the halachic approach to such fertility treatment?

When IVF was first invented it was not initially accepted by the halachic authorities, this was in part due to a concern that mistakes would occur in the laboratory. There would be no way of ascertaining that a child born was in fact related to the “parents”. Children would be born who were not Jewish, or people could

end up marrying family members.

Halachic supervision, developed and provided by PUAH, was sufficient to convince most poskim that IVF could be performed with confidence that mistakes would not occur. Subsequent to supervision becoming available worldwide, many couples have utilized IVF, assured that the child born is definitely their child.

As IVF becomes more common, it is even more essential to have the proper supervision. Clinics are busier than ever, and the increased demand requires a higher level of vigilance to ensure that mistakes cannot happen.

Another halachic concern relates to the commandment to procreate. Does a couple who conceive and deliver a child through IVF fulfill their obligation to “be fruitful and multiply”?

It would appear that the answer is very clear; the mitzvah is to have children, therefore, if a child is born, they have fulfilled the mitzvah, simple as that. It is irrelevant how the child was conceived. The mitzvah is not to conceive; the mitzvah is to have children.

But can we fulfill this, or indeed any, mitzvah in an unusual or “unnatural” way?

More on this next time. ■

רפואה שלמה
הדסה בת חיה

