

kol tikva

Hear Our Voices

High Holiday 5780

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Supporting Jewish People Facing Infertility



dedication page

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As we approach a new year and new beginnings, many of us are confronted with assorted opposing emotions; the hope for a better year that lays ahead and the pain of the past year in which our deepest and most fervent dreams were not fulfilled. As we all journey as a community into this New Year of 5780, we hold space for all these emotions, make room for healing and hope, and lend a hand to those in need. You are not alone on this journey.

The following reflections and insights come from our mental health professionals, clergy and from those who are facing their own fertility journeys. They each reflect different points of view and the experiences of these individuals. May the words and sentiments shared bring you comfort, inspiration and guidance in supporting yourself or others through this High Holiday season and beyond.

Wishing everyone a year of being showered with compassion, of finding the good even in the darkness, and the hope to make each day better.

Shana Tova, happy New Year, from all of us at Yesh Tikva!

Gila Muskin Block
Executive Director



remembering those in our lives at this sensitive time of year

By Dr Talia Hindin

As the summer is winding down and we welcome the month of Elul, we begin to anticipate the time period of the High Holidays that encompasses Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. This time period, also referred to as the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* (ten days of repentance), is a time for self-reflection and introspection. It is a time to give pause, take time for ourselves and look inward and assess ourselves in two areas of our lives. The first is to gain an understanding of how we are doing *bein adam l'Makom* (in our relationship between us and God), namely how do we feel about our relationship with *Hashem* (God), both practically—our adherence to *halacha* (Jewish Law), but perhaps more importantly, spiritually and religiously. How do we relate to *Hashem* on a daily basis? Do we bring Him into our lives and turn to Him as a source of strength and solace? The second area of introspection is that of our *bein adam l'chaveiro*, our interpersonal relationships. Am I a caring and giving person, do I engage in acts of kindness, do I treat others as I would like to be treated? Throughout this process, it is valuable to reflect and assess both our actions and our words to shed light on who we are as individuals.

The prayers and Torah readings on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur help to guide this process and provide inspiration. We

recite *Avinu Malkeinu* (Our Father, Our King), a prayer in which we beseech God, our father and king; we engage in *viduy* (confession) which facilitates the *teshuva* (repentance) process by delineating potential transgressions in which we may have engaged over the course of the year, and we read stories of incredible dedication and sacrifice and the *teshuva* process in which Jews engaged so many thousands of years ago. A theme that emerges during the Torah portion and *Haftarah* on Rosh Hashana, is that of *Hashem* remembering barren women who were struggling to conceive. Our sages tell us that both Sarah and Chana conceived on Rosh Hashana inspiring and instilling hope for those journeying through infertility. This is an opportunity for us to remember our own friends and family members who may also be facing infertility and experiencing challenges building the families of their dreams. Reading about Sarah and Chana provides an opportunity to take inventory about how we relate to, and treat, these individuals that come to mind; what are the words we have said and actions we have done? The Navi describes the pain that Chana endures as she watched Penina have child after child, and her husband Elkana's attempts to ease her pain through material goods and with

his own presence. In thinking about those in our own lives, have we perhaps unknowingly or unwittingly made an insensitive comment? Did we have a long discussion at the Shabbat table about the latest stroller when a childless couple was present? Have we excluded a friend for fear of hurting their feelings? Have we tried pretending that everything is fine or saying that everything will be fine? While reflecting on what we have said or done is important, we want to use that information to shape ourselves moving forward. We want to be able to shift from sympathy, "I feel so bad for them" to empathy, "Wow, I can only imagine how painful that must be". We want to be able to be with our friends and family members in their time of pain; to give their feelings a place to exist and to be there with them in their pain.

Some ideas might include:

- send a text saying, "I am thinking about you and am always here if you want to talk" or "I can only imagine how you might be feeling now, I am thinking about you" or "checking in to see how you are doing"
- give a hug and say "I am here for you"
- ensure that conversation around the holiday table makes everyone feel included and is sensitive to the needs of all the guests present
- invite and include your friends or family members who may be facing infertility and be understanding if the invitation is turned down

- take their lead regarding if and how much they want to share or discuss; make it clear you are there to provide support without being intrusive or pushy
- ensure that these couples do not feel like others are tip-toeing around them or that they are being spoken about behind their backs
- think before complaining about your own children or situation and consider how others around you might experience what you have to say

Being cognizant and aware of our words and actions enables us to be compassionate, caring and understanding individuals, in turn creating a community in which all members feel included, cared for and loved. May we all have a wonderful year full of blessings, good fortune and good health.



practicing self compassion

By Dvora Entin, LCSW

How is it possible that another year has passed? Another 12 months of cycles, of meds, of waiting, of wanting, of hoping, of anger, of resignation, of triggers, of friends being pregnant, of sisters sharing their news. Another 12 months of empty arms. I can't believe I have not been granted the opportunity and gift of motherhood. As Rosh Hashana approaches, and the Jewish world is focused on new beginnings and on assessing the year, a focus on sweetness and hopefulness, for couples facing infertility, it is difficult to find balance and synthesize the opposing experiences. Approaching the holidays can be full of conflict, flip flopping between "Perhaps this will be the year?" and "How is it possible that this year didn't bring a child?"

How does one approach this auspicious time with grace and wisdom? As Rosh Hashana approaches, give yourself permission to acknowledge what time passing means to you. Allow yourself the space to acknowledge how painful this year's struggle has been and how challenging it is to continue the struggle. While positivity and hopefulness are more comfortable emotional states, one can use this time to take a pause in the business of preparation to focus on feelings and emotions.

Think about what HAS been accomplished this year, rather than only what is absent. Where have you grown professionally? Where have you triumphed emotionally? How have you impacted those around you? Have you been a source of strength to those who are also in struggle? Perhaps you have worked on your marriage and your relationship is stronger than it was a year ago. Seek moments of celebration; who you are is not solely defined by being a parent.

Spend a few minutes in conversation with a spiritual advisor, someone who can lift you or support you, giving you a shoulder to cry on or a spiritually oriented focus that works for you to pull through the holidays. It may not be about getting advice and more about allowing community leadership into your story, to feel that the communal space welcomes you and is sensitive to your unique pain and circumstance.

So many struggle with walking into *shul* (synagogue) in the first place. Many feel like they have a pity- target on their back, that their problems are so obvious, and others are looking at them. If there is one thing I have learned as a therapist, it's the harsh but honest reality, that everyone is struggling with something. Some experience their struggle

externally: infertility, divorce, older singles, or bereaved families. No one has to guess what *nisyonot* (challenges) these individuals are facing. But every person sitting near you is struggling with something: mental health, finances, addiction, or relationship difficulties. We humans learn to cope and persevere through extraordinary pain.

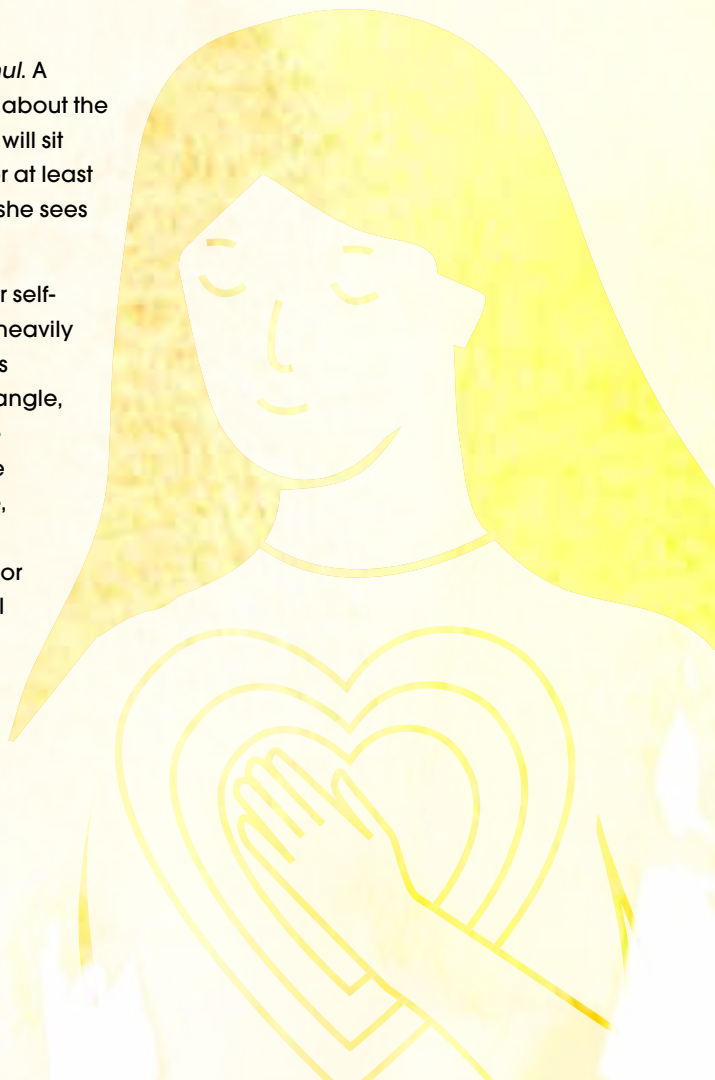
Recognition of the pain of others may not soften your pain, but may give you the opportunity to shift some prayers in the direction of those sitting next to you. Perhaps the great equalizer of shared experience can make it easier to walk in the door.

Consider arranging an ally in *shul*. A friend to whom you have talked about the challenge of going to shul, who will sit near you and “has your back” or at least kind eyes to communicate that she sees you and “gets” you.

More than anything, find time for self-compassion. The world presses heavily for self-care – but as the holidays approach, consider a different angle, one of self-compassion. We are so hard on ourselves. We use the language of failure, failed cycle, ovarian failure, internalizing this message of failure, as if we had or have control over these medical issues. Too many women (and men) further internalize that message with disgust or hatred toward their bodies. Self-compassion is internalizing the bigger message of the holidays. It’s acknowledging that broader surrender of control of our lives, that there is a greater plan

that I just might not understand. It’s talking kindly about our bodies, the broken and hurting ones we are given for this lifetime. It’s finding patience for our emotions and our feelings, respecting whatever is. Self-compassion is about not trying to change the feelings, rather taking pause to reorganize the way we internalize the challenges we are given, the harsh voices in our subconsciousness that crush our spirit.

With hopes that this will be the year of ultimate compassion, that all arms and homes will be filled with healthy children, and all our requests will be granted.



potential

Rabbi Michael Bleicher, LCSW

The High Holidays bring with them so much: anxiety for some, fear in others, hope in many, but most of all, potential. It's a new year, each day representing another page in the next chapter of our lives whose story is yet to be written. So much potential.

Our eyes scan the familiar lines of our tear-stained *machzor* (prayer book) as we whisper those hallowed words through our lips. "*Kama ya'avrun?* Who will struggle with the death of a loved one, the loss of a pregnancy and the loss of potential?" How many more embryos will pass on after a failed IVF cycle? How many more pages in the book of our life, or in the life of a loved one, will include the heartbreaking story of pregnancy loss, fetal reduction or medically required and halachically sanctioned termination? How many couples will pass on to the post-reproductive stage of their lives, willingly or otherwise?

For some couples that are physically and emotionally exhausted from battling infertility for many years, and older singles and divorcees who sometimes feel like giving up their search for a spouse, Rosh Hashana does not evoke hope and potential. Rather, it's just another day that highlights their helplessness to realize their dream, reflect on squandered potential, and mouth the same exact words uttered last year and the year before that, the faith, fervor and passion having evaporated along with the tears of disappointment. "*Kama yibarei'un?* How many will be created?" Will we be able to conceive this year? Will I actually carry this high-risk

pregnancy to term? Will I finally be "born" as a Bubby or a Zaidy this year?

Our heartfelt prayers flow directly from our lips and are propelled upward to God's throne. They are carried by the deep faith we've developed and the sincere hope we cling to that we merit to realize all the potential that comes with being inscribed in the Book of Life for, as my Zaidy z"l (of blessed memory) used to say, only the very best blessings that *Hashem* can lovingly shower upon us.

Every day is a great day to pray for children and Rosh Hashana is an especially auspicious day to pray for children – both for those who seek to expand the size of their family and for those who are eagerly awaiting welcoming their first. Not only is it the first day of the New Year, laden with lots of potential, but the Talmud (Rosh Hashana 10b) teaches us that this day has special significance for those struggling with infertility. On this day, millennia ago, three special women who struggled with infertility for years were blessed to conceive: Sarah, Rachel and Chana.

We read about Sarah's miracle in the Torah reading on the first day of Rosh Hashana which begins, "And God remembered Sarah." Rashi explains that the reason this story is juxtaposed to Avraham's *davening* for Avimelech's recovery from his illness is because since Avraham prayed for a cure for Avimelech, Avraham's own prayer – to be blessed with a son who would inherit him – was answered. Since Avraham *davened* for someone else's needs, God insured

that his own needs were provided for and his wife, Sarah, became pregnant with their son, Yitzchak.

The second matriarch to experience the miracle of fertility on Rosh Hashana was Rachel, whom we read about in the Haftorah for the second day of Rosh Hashana. There she is said to be weeping for her children suffering in exile. The verse says, "God remembered Rachel." In reward for which act did God finally remember Rachel on Rosh Hashana?

Our rabbis teach us that Rachel realized the potential embarrassment her sister was set to endure and graciously offered her sister, Leah, the signs with which to marry Yaakov even though it was she whom Yaakov really desired to marry. In return for her selflessness, she was remembered and blessed with a child.

Finally, the Talmud (ibid.) teaches us that Chana was also blessed with conceiving on Rosh Hashana. Hers is a story that inspires hope and reminds us of the potential of the year ahead as we read it during the Haftorah of the first day of Rosh Hashana.

The verse says, "For God remembered Chana." Why did God remember Chana?

Our rabbis teach us that Chana did not want a child simply to fulfill her own maternal instinct to feed him, dress him, play with him and nurture him. Rav Chaim of Volozhin zt"l explains that when the verse says "*Vatispalal Chana 'al' Hashem* (and Chana prayed unto God)" it means that Chana prayed for a child exclusively so that he could serve God. It was as though she was *davening* for God, instead of for herself.

As we express our heartfelt prayer and submit our plea to parent a new child this year, we read about role models for success in Avraham, Rachel and Chana. They were not only pleading for themselves and their respective spouse; they were simultaneously

considerate of the needs of others. God was so taken by their selflessness and genuine concern for others that He enabled them to finally realize their dreams of parenthood.

If we are *davening* to be blessed with children or grandchildren, we should keep in mind those couples whose hearts have ached for far too long to bring a beautiful baby into this world. If we are *davening* for the financial stability we need to pay for expensive fertility treatments that insurance companies don't typically cover or for therapy with a licensed and trained mental health professional who can help us manage the burden, we should keep in mind those who are under- or unemployed and cannot meet their basic expenses.

Don't just keep that between you and God; send a card/email/text or even call that relative or friend and let them know they're not alone in their valiant struggle. Let them know you see their struggle and tear-filled eyes, you're with them as they keep trying. They'll feel so supported knowing they're in your heart and *tefilos* (prayers) and that you're simply thinking of them as you prepare for Rosh Hashana.

There is so much to *daven* for – today, and every day – and it's clear that our prayers are more effective when we show Hashem that we are at least as concerned with the welfare of our fellow Jews as we are with ourselves.

In the merit of following in the footsteps of Avraham, Rachel and Chana by *davening* (praying) to Hashem on behalf of others this Yamim Noraim, may we – and all the unborn babies we yearn to welcome in 5780 – be inscribed to realize all the potential the Book of Life holds for a sweet new year.

a voice is heard

By Yoetzet Halacha Atara Segal

If the marker of an impactful passage from *Tanakh* (Bible) is the number of melodies that have been crafted to fit the words, one of Navi's "greatest hits" would have to be a section of the Haftarah for the second day of Rosh Hashana, from *Sefer Yirmiyahu*, (The book of Jeremiah)

כֹּה אָמַר ה' קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִל בְּכִי
תַּמְרוּרִים רָחַל מְבַכָּה עַל-בָּנֶיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהַנְחִים
עַל-בָּנֶיהָ כִּי אֵינָנִי: כֹּה אָמַר ה' מִנְעִי קוֹלְךָ
מִבְכִּי וְעֵינַיִךְ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי לֹא שָׁכַר לַפְעֻלָּתְךָ
נָאִם- ה' וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב: וְיִש-תְּקַנָּה
לְאַחֲרִיתָךְ נָאִם- ה' וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגִבּוֹלָם

For so says God: A voice is heard on high, crying and lamenting bitterly; it is Rachel weeping over her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are gone. For so says God: Refrain (your voice) from crying and your eyes from shedding tears; for there is a reward for your deeds, said God; and they shall return from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for your future, said God; and the sons shall return to their borders.

The *Midrash* famously shares that Rachel was not buried in Kiryat Arba (on the outskirts of Hebron), as were so many of our other ancestors, precisely so that she could serve as a source of prayer and comfort on the path the Jews took on their

way to exile following the destruction of the first *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple).

The exiles on their way to Babylonia were not, in fact, only the children of Rachel. They were literally "Jews" from the kingdom of Judea, comprised of Yehuda (Judah) and Levi, the children of Leah, in addition to Binyamin (Benjamin), the child of Rachel. If the goal were to provide comfort and *daven* (pray) for the Jews trudging to exile – why not arrange to have a mother of all these Jews be buried on the path? Why is Rachel's tomb alongside the road, and not Sarah or Rivka (Rebecca)?

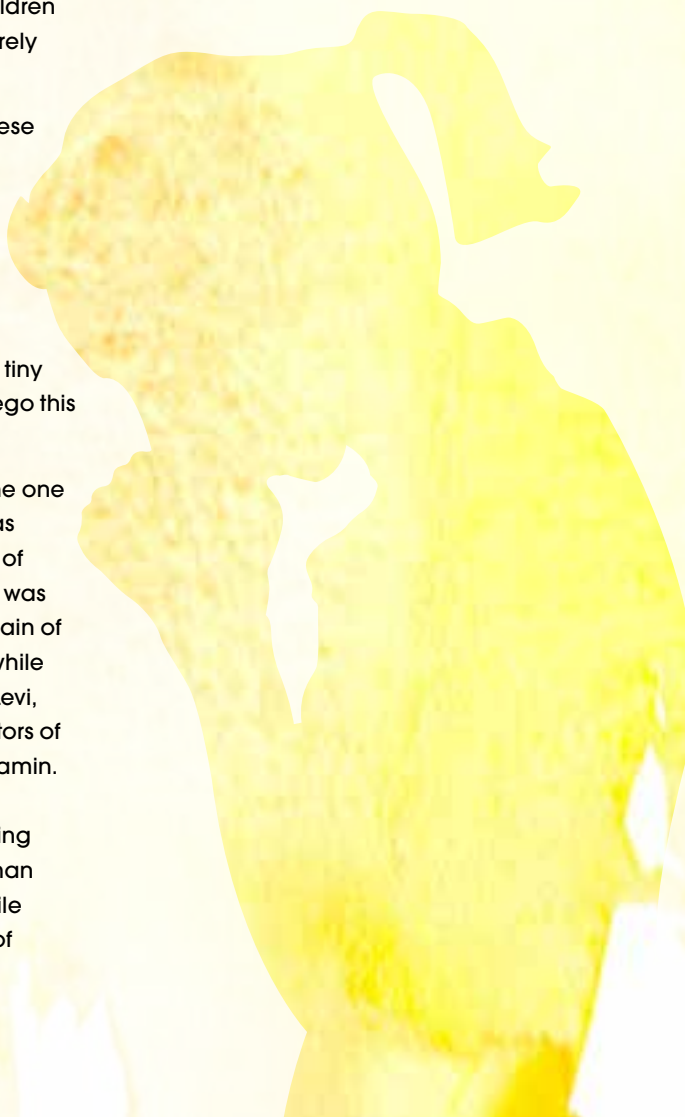
I think the answer lies in the unique experience of Rachel. True, Sarah and Rivka also were well schooled in the life of tears and had spent so many years crying and praying for a child. The Torah tells us explicitly of their yearning to give birth and of their efforts to conceive. But think for a moment of Rachel's life. The *Midrash* further tells us that Rachel is buried on the way to Bavel (Babylonia) because she uniquely can make the argument to God, "You are upset that the Jews betrayed you for other nations and values? I enabled my beloved Yaakov; to marry my sister to spare her embarrassment, without any commitment that I would wed him too; learn from my forbearance and forgive the children of Israel for their betrayal." But

I think we should take it one step further. It is true that Sarah had a “competitor” in her household; Hagar, who bore a child for Avraham years before Sarah did. However, Rachel lived a different existence – for years, the children crying that she heard in her household were not those of a pregnant Hagar whom she could cast out of her home. Rachel heard her own sister in the throes of childbirth; I imagine she bathed, diapered, soothed her many nephews as Leah had to tend to so many little ones at once. These were not merely children who would crowd out Rachel for Yaakov’s affections; these were children who shared Rachel’s blood and surely basked in her love.

And yet, the very prominence of these babies in Rachel’s life must have been a constant reminder of her inability to have a child. We can only imagine how much Rachel must have needed space, wanted occasional distance from the babbling and spilled food and tiny clothing; how often did Rachel forego this need in order to help her sister?

That, I believe, is why Rachel was the one in place for the exiled Jews. She was not only the mother of the children of Binyamin trudging on the way. She was also the aunt who faced her own pain of childlessness on a constant basis while caring for the infants Yehuda and Levi, babies who would become ancestors of the Jews who were exiled with Binyamin. I believe that Yirmiyahu the Navi, in these *pesukim* (verses), is recognizing the particular challenges of a woman (and man) yearning for a child while surrounded by the many children of others.

During this season of *chagim* (holidays), a time of family gatherings and communal events, Rachel serves as a beacon for support and understanding. She epitomizes the difficulties of sharing in the joys of others while still bearing the pain of one’s own suffering. Let us make room for the emotions of our family members and friends who are navigating their own struggles this holiday season; without judgment, let us give them the space they may require and lend support when needed.



reflections

By Anonymous

As the High Holidays are approaching, there is a small twinge of dread that is starting to develop somewhere deep down inside. You see, I experienced the most painful time of my life just a few weeks after Yom Kippur of last year.

Yom Kippur has been a bit of a mixed experience for me over the course of my fertility journey. It has been filled with tentative requests for pregnancy, then urgent pleas, prayers for my eventual first pregnancy to work out well, and then prayers for the welfare of my young child.

Last year I found myself pregnant again on Yom Kippur, after brief and successful fertility treatment. The treatment had gone so smoothly that my husband and I were almost able to trick ourselves into feeling like we were those 'normal' people who get pregnant when they wish. A short while later, however, we lost the pregnancy, which at that point was significantly progressed.

Shortly after the loss, our community rabbi came by to provide grief counseling. He asked whether we had experienced any doubts or questions related to our faith or observance since the loss had occurred. My first thought was about Yom Kippur, how I had sat in synagogue feeling content and happy, as if I had somehow

defeated my infertility and was in charge of my reproduction. I thought about the fact that I had not cried like I had in previous years, had not begged with all of my heart and soul for the fate of my family and the baby growing inside me. Thinking about this, I felt as if I was at fault for the miscarriage, merely by failing to acknowledge the fragility of it all and my powerlessness to control the outcome. I felt as if I was being punished for allowing myself for a few brief weeks to feel like I was one of all of those women who have never had to set foot inside a fertility clinic.

The rabbi explained that the concept of reward and punishment in Judaism is not so simple. He provided the analogy of a mathematical function, in which one enters a number and ends up with a completely different number at the end—and only the one who completed the problem knows how he got there. Similarly, we are aware of our actions and are aware of the positive and negative events in our lives but are incapable of understanding how the two connect.

In the short term, I found myself feeling very angry and resentful about this idea. If my actions did not matter, or it was impossible to know whether they did, what was the point? As time went on, I had more distance from the loss, and began

preparing to begin treatment again. I was able to think more honestly about my feelings regarding my own contribution to our struggles. I decided that I was truly ambivalent about the idea of not being at fault. On the one hand, it relieved uncomfortable feelings of responsibility and ideas that every trip to the doctor's office was some form of divine retribution. On the other hand, it made it feel as if I was completely powerless to change the course of my life. I ultimately realized that I do not actually want to feel like there is simply nothing I can do.

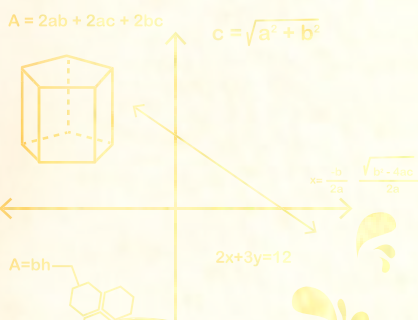
It seems that the rabbis of the Talmud felt the same way. In *Masechet Brachot*, *daf hey amud alef*, (Tractate Blessings, Page 5, Side 1) Rav/Rav Chisda stated: "If someone finds that suffering has come upon him, he should examine his actions...if he examines and does not find anything, he should assume that it is due to wasting time that could have been spent studying Torah..." To me, this passage is empowering and is a call to action. It places the ball in my court. It is more comforting to me than the statement 'It's all in God's hands' (usually followed by a shrug).

I started to think about small steps that I could take that would allow me to feel like I was bettering myself without taking on so much that I would feel

overwhelmed and ingenuine. For me, those steps were praying the morning or afternoon prayers when I could and taking time to pray for other women I know going through fertility issues.

As the high holidays approach this year, I really do not know what to expect. I don't know whether I will feel like my actions to better myself were not enough, whether I'll wonder if my continued struggle to get pregnant again are due to my making excuses and not taking on more. Perhaps I will feel a glint of anger at God as I see the inevitable sea of pregnant bellies around myself in the women's section of synagogue. My hope is that I will be able to allow these feelings to wash over me, acknowledge them, and then think about what steps I can take to try to better myself and alleviate the suffering of myself and others.

May we all find inspiration, comfort, moments of joy, and areas of growth during this holiday season.



in shul on rosh hashana

By Anonymous



A shuffle of pages turning, the *baal korei* (the Torah reader) begins, and I silently sigh. We're in *shul* (synagogue) on Rosh Hashana, and we're up to the part I've been mildly dreading: the *Hafforah* reading. While I normally enjoy reading the stories of *Tanach* (Bible), it's hard to be sitting among neighbors and friends as we read a story about a woman facing infertility, struggling to conceive, praying and hoping for salvation. My heart beats a little faster, and my fingers, gripping my *machzor* (prayer book), are a bit sweatier. My ears redden, and as I try to follow along the words inside, my eyes blur

out of focus. Is everyone looking at me? Thinking of me? Pitying me? How can I blend into the crowd or shrink into my seat inconspicuously?

Minutes pass. We're a few *pesukim* (verses) in, and now I feel calmer. Feelings of self-consciousness behind me, I am

comforted by the story we're reading. I'm glad for the relevance, grateful for the validation, and content that everyone in *shul*, during this brief and passing moment in time, can feel Chana's pain along with her. Soon, most of my fellow congregants will have moved on, and some of us will still be holding onto that pain, hoping for an extra sweet new year.

on dreading the high holidays

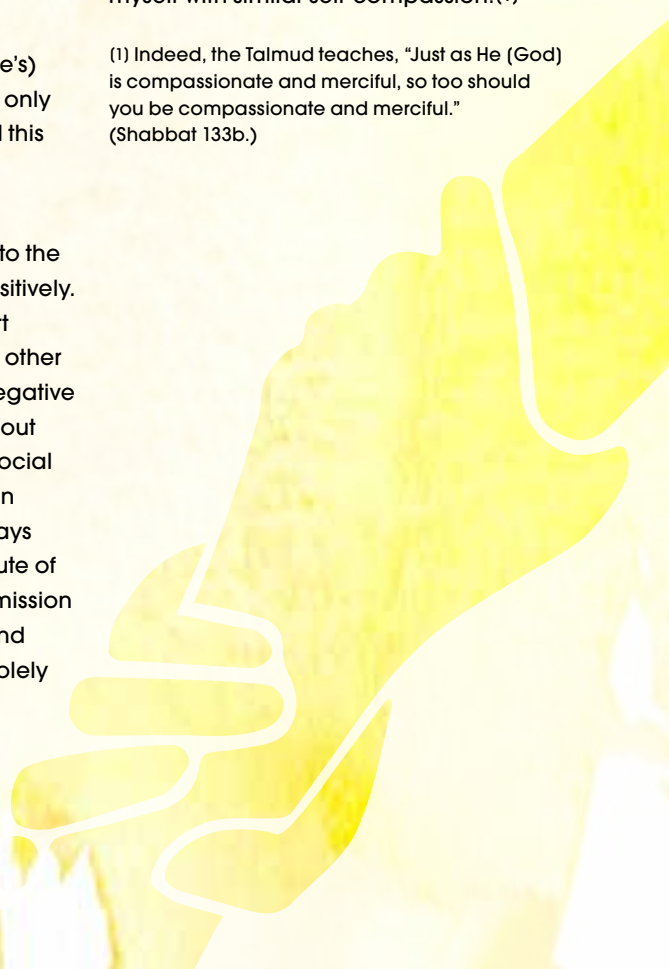
By Chaya

Long before learning that I have infertility, I found Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur stressful. Their emphasis on judgment and sin made me dread the *Yamim Nora'im*, the High Holidays. Experiencing unexplained infertility, the attendant fear of an uncertain future, and the unhealthy feeling that my infertility (although somehow not anyone else's) was some sort of divine punishment only exacerbated my discomfort around this judgment-laden time of year.

Surprisingly, experiencing infertility eventually led me to begin relating to the High Holidays and God far more positively. During Yesh Tikva's phone-in support group before Rosh Hashana in 2017, other members of the group expressed negative feelings, very much like my own, about the High Holidays. Dvora Entin, the social worker who led the call, suggested in response that during the High Holidays we try focusing only on God's attribute of *rachamim*, mercy. She gave us permission to set aside thoughts of judgment and punishment and to embrace God solely as *Avinu*, a father who loves us and cares about our wellbeing. Dvora's suggestion helped me approach these past two years' High Holidays far more joyfully and

calmly than I had previously. And her suggestion also inspired me to start trying in general to regard God as kind rather than vindictive. This year, as we approach the High Holidays, I hope to deepen my appreciation of God's mercy and treat myself with similar self-compassion. (1)

(1) Indeed, the Talmud teaches, "Just as He (God) is compassionate and merciful, so too should you be compassionate and merciful." (Shabbat 133b.)



when joy and heartbreak coexist

By Peninah Lamm Kaplansky

One of the most joyous moments in the life of a couple is standing under the chuppah at their wedding, celebrating their hopes and dreams of a new shared future. And yet, in this extraordinarily happy moment, they are asked to pause for a moment to remember the tragic destruction of the *Bet Hamikdash* (Temple).

The experience of a couple going through infertility is a lonely one. Often times, even though we knew it not to be true, it felt like we were the only ones in our community who were not pregnant or did not recently give birth. This isolation seemed especially prevalent during the *Yamim Nora'im* (High Holidays), when we reflected on the past year: a year where we did not successfully conceive, another year when we were not able to build our family.

I remember the *Yamim Nora'im* four years ago, when we had had a stillbirth months before and were just beginning fertility treatments. I was looking at Facebook throughout the month of *Tishrei* and saw a steady stream of pictures of my friends' children, holding an apple and honey

and shaking their first *lulav* and *etrog*. It was so joyous, and yet so heartbreaking (and if we're being honest, I leaned more towards the heartbroken feeling at that time.) I couldn't help but feel like my life was so incomplete and inadequate. Now you might be thinking that I am asking you, dear friend or family member or a couple who is going through a fertility journey, to hide your joy to the world as not to offend or hurt those of us who are struggling to conceive, but I am not. *Hashem* (God) has given you wonderful gifts and you should be proud of them and enjoy them. I am only asking that as you celebrate your beautiful children, just as the bride and groom celebrate under the chuppah, you pause for a moment, and remember those who do not feel whole, who have gone through tragedy, who have experienced loss (of any kind!), who are still on their long journey. That you pause for a moment to tell a friend that she is in your *tefillot* (prayers), that you would love to go out to coffee with her during this really hard season (without your kids), that you are happy and willing to listen to her vent...again.

And to those of you who are struggling, as unrefined as it may sound... I am sending you a huge amounts of hugs. This time of the year can be really difficult and it takes a lot of strength to get through it with your head held high. I pray that in this coming year your tefillot are answered, like the tefillot of Rachel and Chana.

”רבונו של עולם, כשם ששמעת לחנה בתפילתה
כן תשמע ותענה לתפילתנו”

“Creator of the Universe, just as you listened to Chana in her prayers, so too hear and answer our prayers”



a reflection from a distance

By Praying for my daughter

Yom Tov (the holidays) is family time... I guess from the time my daughter was born, I always thought about how eventually she would be getting married and then having a family of her own. And, *B"H* (thank God), she is married... but not yet blessed with her own children. I see all the strollers outside the *shul* (synagogue) – I am happy for all those mothers and my friends who are there with their grandchildren. And, although I do have grandchildren, it is still painful to see all those strollers outside...

Simchas Torah is hard – I do attend *Birchas Nearim* (the blessing of the children) – and can't even imagine my son-in-law's thoughts as he holds up the *tallis* (prayer shawl). After all, he is free to hold it up, as still no young child on his shoulders... And, when I see a young mother in *shul* struggling with her young kids, my instinct is to take the baby from her hands – but then I question myself – should I? Would it hurt my daughter to see me holding another women's baby? Would that just increase her pain? I know she would tell me to help, but what is she really thinking?

The Jewish holidays, in general, are family time. When my other kids come, I am so happy. Yet, at the same time, I always stop myself – am I devoting too much time to

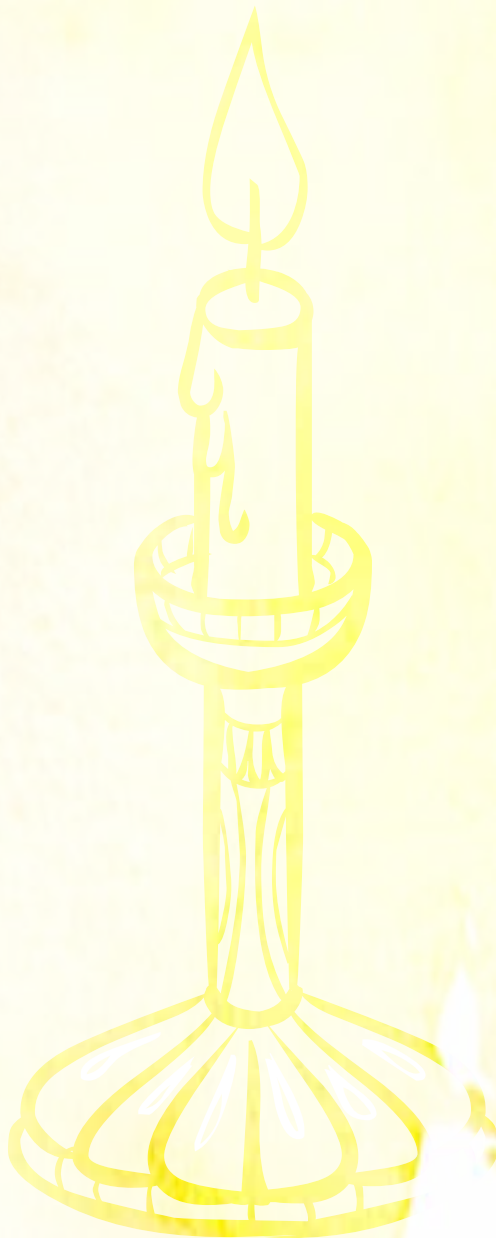
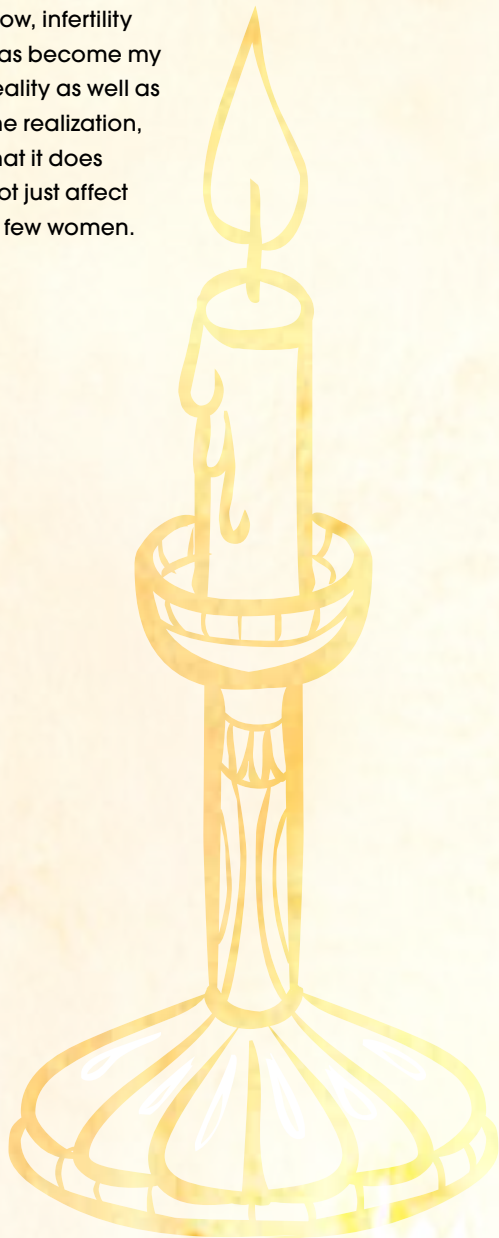
my grandchildren? Does my daughter still feel valued, even though she is not coming with children? Am I giving my daughter the attention she also needs, or is my time mainly spent helping my kids who are so busy with their own? And to watch my daughter *daven* (pray)... on the one hand so inspiring; on the other hand, so painful as it is obvious what she is *davening* (praying) for...when my kids were little, a kiss and a Band-Aid were able to solve most cries. Life is so much more complicated...I need to respect my kids privacy, yet so want to know if they are any closer to having their dreams fulfilled. I realize that I can't even offer them any advice – they are so much more educated than I am in this area...

There is also the pain of not being able to protect her from the insensitivity of others. Hearing people ask her if she wants to hold their infant (some sort of *segula*/merit)? No idea what they are thinking, or rather, not thinking. Or others telling her that one day she will understand the stress of making a *simcha* (celebration) when her children grow up and she needs to make one for them (say amen?) And even myself, I purposely have so few pictures of my grandchildren hanging in the living room. I just don't want to bring more attention to them...

As I myself, B"H (thank God) never experienced infertility; it is not something I ever really thought about – just as something that happens to a few unfortunate women who probably got married late in life. My ignorance is unfortunately still shared by many...

Now, infertility has become my reality as well as the realization, that it does not just affect a few women.

But even if it affects just one woman, if that woman is one's own daughter, then that is one woman too many...





yesh **HOPE** TIKVA

Supporting Jewish People Facing Infertility

Yesh Tikva, Hebrew for "There is Hope," was established to end the silence and create a community of support for all Jewish people facing infertility.

Yesh Tikva gives a voice to these struggles, breaks down barriers and facilitates the conversation surrounding infertility.

For more information visit us at www.yeshtikva.org

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