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Anonymous
Gila and Rabbi David Block
Ruhama and Rabbi Elazar Muskin

channa
Careena and Drew Parker
Beth Ann Locke
Since the start of Corona, time has taken on a dichotomous existence. On the one hand it is slow and days mesh into each other, while somehow these long days have turned quickly into weeks and months and time has rapidly flown by and once again we are facing the New Year. We stand at the crossroads of closure and hope. Tasked to look back on the year that has passed and make peace with what was and was not. And then we look to the future, hoping and praying that this year will be filled with the answers to our fervent dreams.

As we approach 5781, some of Yesh Tikva’s couples navigating their fertility journey share their thoughts, fears and hopes with you. Each piece reflects the individual’s story. No two people experience infertility in the same way. But one thing remains constant: The prayer, the yearning, the desire to grow their family in 5781.

May their words and sentiments bring you inspiration, comfort, and guidance in supporting yourself or others experiencing infertility.

Wishing you a year full of happiness and joy, a year where we demonstrate true empathy and compassion for our fellow Jew and a year which is full of good.

Shana Tova! Happy New Year!

Gila Block, Executive Director
and the Yesh Tikva Team
I didn’t see this coming. I didn’t even have it on my radar. Isn’t this the theme of 2020? As we continue to look around and question the reality of this experience, of the intensity of frustrations as the world opens and closes and the pundits talk in circles about reality and anticipation and what we know and what we don’t know. We look at each other and say things like, “It can’t get any worse” and then it does. We look at each other through screens and voice our disbelief and even our grief of what IS and what ISN’T. We look around and say, but I don’t want to do this anymore and I am so uncomfortable and I hate this, and I just want the innocence back, of life before this, of things filled with hope and promise and possibility, and even just the feeling of normal. I miss the life of “before” when things felt a little more predictable.

And yet, we sit together, though apart and commiserate, and look at not so funny memes and wonder about the future. We hold each other in the intensity and in the shock, in the sadness and even in the possibility, as we settle into this new experience, with the language of distance and pandemic and the ever present “put on your mask.”

It is such a foreign experience and yet for so many, it’s actually a very familiar space. For the couples walking the infertility path, this experience is feeling awfully familiar. It’s the experience of desperately not wanting to be in this place, of wanting to be somewhere else entirely, and no amount of intervention of ideas or creativity or even deep passionate wishing allows them to transcend this space. It is the feeling of being stuck in a vortex that no one really knows your length of stay. It’s running on a treadmill when others around you are completing their second marathon on the streets. The looking beyond your doors and wondering, is this real? However did I get here and how do I move on from this painful experience?

When the world shut down because of a pandemic, the couples in struggle looked around and said, “welcome.” They turned to us and said, “get
comfortable with the uncomfortable.” And we looked at each other and said, “so this is what it feels like.” And at some point, by choice or by chance, we began the process of accepting that this is where we are. We are in this space together and leaning on the shoulders of our friends and wonder about when life will move forward and when the future will feel bright again.

And in that space we can choose to see the hope of a future where life can be different. That as the world turns on its axis it offers us a future of possibility. We did not see this coming and we can insert in that space of vulnerability - the opportunity of hope, when anything is possible and when anything can happen. In that hope we place our dreams of a future that’s brighter, a future with a full family, a future where we have the privilege of worrying about schooling our children. The future is indeed bright, a place where anything is possible. May this year be the year that we stand in awe of all the possibilities of blessings and that our arms and hearts are full.

Dvora Entin, LCSW, PMH-C, is Yesh Tikva’s Clinical Consultant and facilitator of our virtual support groups for couples navigating infertility. She specializes in Maternal Mental Health, inclusive of infertility, perinatal loss, fetal anomaly terminations, and postpartum depression/anxiety.
As I write this, it is the eve of Rosh Chodesh Av, exactly two months before Rosh Hashana. This is a time of year that normally leads us from the depths of mourning on Tisha B’Av to the heights of joy on the fifteenth of Av (Tu B’Av). In Elul, we begin the journey of examining the year and retracing ourselves through the missteps of the previous year and repairing the relationships we have damaged. It is a time of prayer, introspection, and reconciliation. And it is a time of great hope. We hope that we will not repeat the mistakes of prior years. We hope for better relationships. We hope for parnasa and health for the coming year. And for those of us struggling with infertility, we hope that this year will be fruitful when last year wasn’t.

In the grips of a pandemic, it is difficult to hope. It is also odd. Hundreds of thousands of people have died and millions are out of work. We have no idea when the world will come out of this. Sometimes I ask myself if I even want to bring a child into this world. Does it make sense to bring a new life into a world with so much suffering and uncertainty? Will this child even be able to do what children do — to play with friends and family, to laugh, to be carefree?

When I think this way, I remind myself that perspective is the answer. Humans are shortsighted by our nature. I’ve been working from home for 4 months, but I’ve been alive for almost 40 years. Somehow or another, my experience in the last 4 months has eclipsed the past 40 years in my mind. The same can be said for the larger perspective of history.

Regardless of your politics, it’s easy to get caught up in the last 4, 8, or 12 years and feel like the world is deteriorating. Students of history understand that the world has been getting better in almost every way for a long, long time. We just have to zoom out a bit to see this. This truth became stark to me after reading a book called *Enlightenment Now: The Case*
for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress by the Harvard Psychologist, Steven Pinker. In the book, Pinker depicts with many graphs how the world and human condition have been improving in almost every measurable way over the centuries.

Progress is not made in minutes, hours, days, or weeks. Perhaps that’s why wisdom comes with age. We have to live a certain amount of time before we can have the perspective required to see progress over time, which can give us hope for the future.

Koheles (Ecclesiastes) tells us that “A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven… A time for being born and a time for dying, A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted… A time for weeping and a time for dancing, A time for wailing and a time for dancing…”.

When I find myself in the time of weeping, I remind myself there is a time for laughing. When I find myself in the time of wailing, I remind myself there is a time for dancing. And I remember that hope is not dead.
The Yamim Noraim (High Holidays) are never easy. As a child, these days meant long, confusing services in shul and a strong desire for a nap. As a married woman experiencing infertility, these days now provide the challenge of examining my entire life, searching for a reason why I don’t yet have a child.

I always wanted to have a normal life - to get married young, to buy a house and have a family. I never had dreams of fame, success or changing the world. Yet, despite these eminently reasonable desires, I instead experienced heartbreak in college, years spent dating in the Heights and on the UWS, and a painful short-term marriage ending in divorce. I never understood why I couldn’t just have the basic Jewish life I always wanted.

Those experiences, however, led me to my husband and our wonderful life together. They were all worth it. Except now it appears we have one more challenge to face, and I do not understand it. Why am I not able to catch a break? Why does my husband, a convert who spent years working to join the Jewish people, need to struggle with the first mitzvah (commandment), pru urvu (be fruitful and multiply)? There are times I just feel like screaming, for I cannot understand it.

At the same time, who am I to complain? My husband and I love each other totally and we are physically and financially secure. I have friends in their 30s on the UWS, still trying to find their bashert. I have friends who can barely make ends meet financially, friends who have experienced abuse, friends who struggle with the everyday realities of life. Chazal (Our Sages) teach us that Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Chana all struggled with infertility because Hashem (God) desires the prayers of the righteous. Am I righteous? Can I possibly consider myself at the same level as our...
holy ancestors?

On this Rosh Hashanah, I do not know how to feel. Do I express gratitude for everything I have been given in my life, or do I lament my current infertility? Do I thank Hashem (God) for my husband and our life together, or do I break down in despair as another year has passed without a child?

I wish I knew the answer. I am sure when I am davening (praying) I will feel both gratitude and anguish, elation and frustration. But through it all, I will try to focus on our community and all the challenges we face together. I put my trust in Hashem (God), that this year, 5781, be the one in which all our prayers will be answered.
There is no blanket advice I can give to anyone going through infertility, especially during this time of year, but I will give some advice on things I wish I would have done sooner.

1. Take time to figure out what will make you happy this holiday season.

That could mean buying a book you've been wanting to read, a game, or making time to take a nap. It's really whatever will make sure you can be as happy as possible during this difficult time.

2. It is totally okay to spend the holidays by yourself or with friends.

I know what you're thinking - holidays are a time for family. But if your family causes you anxiety, then you have to do what is best for you. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise.

3. Find a place to pray that makes you happy!

It took me years to realize I really hated going to the same minyan as my family. And especially when I started facing infertility, I started going to a minyan that children do not go to. It makes me sound bitter, but I'm fine with that because it helped me.


Seems simple enough but unfortunately it can be one of the hardest things to do when you're under a lot of stress. Make sure you take the time to clear your head and just breathe. Take time to get away from your partner and/or family to meditate. It makes all the difference in the world.

This year I am entering the high holidays with a lot of sadness, but also a lot of hope. After a failed round of IVF we were able to do another round where we were blessed with a
healthy embryo. Infertility has taught me it is not about what other people have or what makes them happy, it is about what you have and what makes you happy. Take the time to do things that will make you happy during this difficult time. Focus on the good things in your life. Find the big and small things that you can be thankful for.

I am wishing you all a happy and healthy New Year. May all our prayers be answered for the best.
Since I was a small girl, I have been planning every detail of my life. Whether it was my bat mitzvah, sweet sixteen, the husband I would marry, my wedding, or even what my kids' names would be. My mom always said that I would be some type of planner, and when I decided to go into the field of home organization – it was a no brainer to her.

Unlike a home though, there are some things in life beyond our control and organizational abilities. We may be able to organize what we want to call our children, plan their brit milah, birthday parties, or even bar mitzvahs. We may learn and speak to our friends and professionals about every detail regarding pregnancy, strollers, or birth. Yet, we cannot control whether or when we conceive.

Of course, just like anyone else, we should be on top of our health and follow the instructions from our physicians on how to do so, but even if we prime our bodies optimally for birth and take complete control of our health, a child may not come. Therefore, we wait.

We wait as we see those around us move on. We wait as others announce their pregnancies, births, brit milot, and second pregnancies. We wait as we see mothers getting together in the park while we sit at home trying to fill the void. We wait as our friends celebrate their child’s first steps, first words, and first friends. We wait, simply because there is nothing else we can do.

We wait and wait, and perhaps wait some more, as we lose hope.

Yet, we also remember that hope and belief that one day we too will have our child, is the only thing that will pull us through. One day, we too will be able to dust ourselves off and embrace our children. We too will announce our pregnancies, births,
and brit milot. We will get together with other mothers and our babies in the park and we will celebrate as our children take their first steps, speak their first words, and make their first friends. While often we have to be reminded that it will happen, deep down we dig and trust that it will. We remember the words that my older sister told me as I grew up: “If Hashem (God) brings you to it, He will bring you through it.”

This is not an easy feat. Often, we have to dig with a very big shovel. Often, we can’t even dig on our own. Often, we have to let ourselves give Hashem (God) the shovel. Often, we have to realize that we are not in control and just trust.

Just like Chana and Sara who we read about on Rosh HaShana, we pray that not only will we be put into the book of life but Hashem (God) will remember us and help us to create life as well. Until then, we wait and trust, and relinquish control.
I see so much pain when I look at my friends and family members who have struggled with infertility. It has given me a new perspective of what life is really about, and I daven (pray) for them each day that they should have their yeshua (salvation). I have learned to be empathetic and sensitive to other people’s needs because you NEVER really know what is happening.

While we are still davening (praying) for our child, I am scared that due to certain health issues, we may possibly be faced with having to go through our own infertility journey. I don’t like not knowing what’s next, and I want to know when I will finally become a mother. I’m scared, but I know that we are not alone.

This year the Yomim Noraim (high Holidays) will be different for me, not just because of Corona but because I am ready to start my family. When I daven (pray), am I supposed to be grateful for what I have, or am I supposed to be upset with what I don’t have? We are taught to be thankful, but what about being jealous? Am I allowed to be jealous that so many of my friends were blessed with their children so quickly?

I know I am allowed to be scared of the unknown. I know that I am allowed to feel uncomfortable going to shul (synagogue) in fear of seeing my friends with their children. I also know that like Chana, I am allowed to cry publicly and ask Hashem (God) to answer my prayers through my tears. I am grateful for the strides the Jewish community has made to support those struggling with infertility and prevent them from suffering in silence.

This year during the Neilah prayer on Yom Kippur, when we say L’shana Habah B’Yerushalayim (Next Year in Jerusalem), I will pray not only for Moshiach (Messiah) to come, but also that all our prayers for personal redemption be answered.
Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman was known as the “Ponevezher Rav” for his time spent as the chief rabbi of Ponevezh, Lithuania. When WWII broke out, Rabbi Kahaneman was in Palestine and opted to stay there as his beloved family, yeshiva, and town were ruthlessly wiped out. When discussing with Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog his plans to reconstruct some semblance of what was lost in Europe on Israeli soil, the grandiosity of Kahaneman’s plan seemed inconceivable. “You’re dreaming,” said Herzog incredulously to Kahaneman, who responded “I may be dreaming, but I’m not sleeping.” It’s no wonder that he became one of the great builders of post-war, religious Jewry in Israel.

We may be dreaming, but we’re not sleeping. On Rosh Hashanah we pour out our hearts for our own needs and the needs of our greater community. We’ve reflected on the year gone by and now stand before the Almighty as we contemplate our hopes and dreams for the future. There are those with dreams of grandeur who don’t often endeavor to make them come true. Conversely, there are those who dream with eyes wide open, putting forth every ounce of strength they have to make them a reality. For those struggling to create the family they so desire, the dream and the effort couldn’t be more real.

We may be dreaming, but we’re not sleeping. Both in a figurative and literal sense. We’re awake hours before “real life” and responsibilities begin. An entire day’s worth of emotions can be mustered in an hour at the doctor’s office before a full day of work or school, before the sun comes up. We lie awake thinking about whether this treatment will be successful. Figuratively, we may be stuck at a standstill waiting for test results that dictate the next steps, but it’s those next steps that fill our minds with the dreams
that we try to make happen.

Rosh Hashanah is a day that’s marked with judgement, but it’s also a day filled with hope. It’s found in the Torah reading as we read of Abraham and Sarah’s longing for and promise of progeny, and found in the story of the binding of their beloved miracle child, Isaac. It’s in the Haftorah among the pain of Hannah’s plea to have a child and in the voice of Rachel who cries bitterly for her children, who are not with her.

The hope is present in the liturgy, customs, and even the shofar. The Talmud explains that the shofar is sounded during the Musaf prayer, after the original blasts following the Haftorah, to confound the Satan who seeks to accuse us of wrongdoing and evoke a strict Divine sentence. When the Satan hears the original blasts, he understands it’s Judgement day and readies his charges against us. Yet, when the second blasts begin, he is confused, believing this is the redemptive shofar ushering in the Messiah, and feels as if he’s missed his chance to castigate the Jewish people for their shortcomings. Even after thousands of years the Satan is still confounded. Wouldn’t this angel know that this scene repeats itself year after year and that ultimately it isn’t the shofar of Mashiach?

The answer is that this could be the year.

This could be the year that the pain and longing to have the family we dream of comes to fruition. The year when the tests and treatments work the way in which we want them. Awoken by the shofar, we will still be dreaming, but we will definitely not be sleeping.
Do you have friends or family whom you suspect may be navigating infertility this holiday season?

During this season actively engage them to let them know that you care. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **By message**: A message on your preferred platform to say “hello” and wish them a Shanna Tova.

2. **By phone**: For some, a quick phone call may offer an important connection, particularly if this is the way you usually engage.

3. **By sending a card**: A card with your heart-felt message can be held and re-read privately.

4. **Face to Face**: Invite family members and/or friends in person and virtually to get-togethers as you usually would. However, if they say they are not up to joining, allow them to make the decision for themselves, accept their reason, and do not make them feel guilty for opting out.
Hosting a meal or get-together (in person or virtually)?
Ensure that everyone can feel emotionally included:

1. Be mindful of the group you are gathering – is it family? Friends? Both?
   Be aware that someone present may be struggling.

2. Make sure the conversation does not revolve around marriage and kids,
   particularly if there are people who are not married or do not have children.

3. Engage in conversations where everyone may be an active participant.

Here are three Alternative Conversation Starters to test out:

**Food:**
What is the weirdest food combination you’ve ever tried?
Have you made sourdough bread?
What’s your favorite new recipe?

**Entertainment:**
Read any good books lately?
What is your favorite movie?
Watching anything good that you would recommend?

**Weird Fact:**
What’s something that most people do not know about you?
If you can be a color what would it be?
When Corona is over where is the first place you want to visit?
Yesh Tikva, Hebrew for “There is Hope,” was established to end the silence and create a Jewish community of support for all Jewish people facing infertility. Yesh Tikva provides free professional psychosocial services, resources and tools to those struggling with infertility. Together we raise awareness and sensitivity on this subject throughout the Jewish community.

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

For more information or to make a gift visit us at yeshtikva.org or be in touch at support@yeshtikva.org