

kol tikva

Hear Our Voices

High Holiday 5782

yesh tikva

Supporting Jewish People Facing Infertility

About Yesh Tikva

Struggling to have a child, be it one's first or any subsequent child, can create constant feelings of stress, anguish and helplessness. According to the National Survey of Family Growth, 1 in 8 couples in America is diagnosed with infertility each year.

In the Jewish community, where holidays, traditions and rituals often revolve around children, people facing infertility may feel isolated and lonely.

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 offers free professional psychosocial services, resources and tools to those struggling with infertility, while simultaneously educating the broader Jewish community through raising awareness and sensitivity to the issue.

Supporting the 1 in 8

An infertility diagnosis and follow-up treatment isn't just physically and financially draining. It takes an emotional toll as well. To meet the need,

Yesh Tikva provides free, professional emotional support services, resources and tools facilitated by trained mental health professionals.

Supporting Others

It takes a village to grow a family through infertility. Yesh Tikva's goal is for everyone - family, friends and communal leaders - to be a part of that support village to the 1 in 8 in their lives. Learn how you can support others in struggle.

Read some of Yesh Tikva's educational guides on how to be an ally, learn about infertility, attend virtual events or participate in a workshop for communal leaders to understand the issues surrounding infertility, ensuring that all Jewish people feel welcome within our synagogues and communal spaces.

Learn more about Yesh Tikva's services and work

Website: YeshTikva.org Email: support@YeshTikva.org

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yesh_tikva



yeshtikva.org



From my heart to yours...

For many, this holiday season will be filled with the excitement and joy of reconnecting with friends and family for the first time in nearly two years. For others this transition will be met with fear, anxiety and trepidation. For many of the 1 in 8 struggling with infertility who have had respite from glancing eyes, probing questions and wearing a brave face, this next phase of reentering society is being met with apprehension.

This added stress and anxiety can be felt throughout the posts in this year's High Holiday Journal. Some of Yesh Tikva's couples navigating their infertility journey have a different perspective on community and what it means. The time spent away from community? It was a blessing, not a curse.

For them, the dawning of a new year means new hope for a year in which they too will have their prayers answered. They hope, they desire, they yearn to grow their family by just one. And that one means the world to them.

I invite you to read and internalize their words. Their frustrations. Their aspirations. I hope it will inspire you to support those in your community experiencing infertility. But not just support- make them feel welcome, wanted and part of your community.

I wish you and your family a year of good health, blessings, joy, happiness and peace.

Shana Tova! Happy New Year!

Gila Muskin Block and the Yesh Tikva Team





A Changing Community

Dvora Entin LCSW, PMH-C, Yesh Tikva's Clinical Consultant

It's remarkable to consider what this year has been. The past many months are marked with extraordinary moments of challenge, of change, of "unprecedented times." We have lived through another circle around the sun.

As we begin to emerge from our homes and as our social calendars begin to fill, we can take pause at what has changed, at how our community has changed, and notice the way the world looks different. What do we want to hold onto from these changes? What do we hope will return to the way life was "before?"

Jewish life has always centered around community, around the celebrations and shared tragedies, around obligations and opportunities for religious practice. For many, community means showing up to support each other, learning the ways that we rise when there is tragedy. It can be a place of safety, of feeling like home, where a person is needed and valued.

Community can be a space of growth, of learning from leadership both at the front and back of the room. It also may feel burdensome, where participation requires social obligations, evenings away from home, smiling and saying that "everything is great" when real life rarely is.

For others, community is a place that feels lonely, even in a crowd. It can be a place

that highlights their space in the outer circles, wanting desperately for a seat in the center, a place to feel like they finally belong. Community can be a place full of triggers, of pregnant bellies and strollers and speeches about passing tradition to the next generation.

So as the doors to our synagogues and social halls open, as we begin to attend events both out of obligation as well as pleasure, what has changed? How has this communal space shifted?

Ultimately, I ask, how have I changed? Do I return to community as I was before? Do I bring something new to this space? Can I consciously choose something different and do I need to?

To return to where I was before, or to envision a space with fresh eyes and perspective. What does our community need from me? What do I have to offer? Who is standing at the margins and can I turn toward them with an invitation?

I don't want to go back to the way things were before. I want to hold on tightly to the lessons and pace of a pandemic. To the recognition that our community and communal spaces are not guaranteed or promised. I want to hold on to the hope that we can do better to create communities of support and compassion and that these spaces will fill with warmth and hope and connection.

Social Distancing Before It was the Norm

By A.K.



As awful and horrific as the Covid-19 pandemic has been, the social distancing and forced avoidance of people and public places was exactly what I needed.

Anywhere I went before would fill me with anxiety as I worried about who I would see that would trigger feelings of pain and jealousy. Nowhere was this truer than at synagogue. Walking through the doors, I was immediately hit with stark reminders of my infertility: the crowded hallway of strollers, mothers with their young children (and many times, with their growing bellies) congregating outside the sanctuary chitchatting until services ended, the sound of the kids in the children's programs singing songs and *davening* (praying)... This was all amplified ten times over during the High Holidays. Every year was torture.

I stopped going to synagogue about nine months before the pandemic hit. I just couldn't handle it anymore. I stopped going for Shabbat walks around our neighborhood at times when I knew more people would be out so I wouldn't risk running into the plethora of pregnant women in our community. I used Covid as an excuse to not stop and talk with people we did see — "Social distancing! 6 feet!" Did I look like a fool? Probably, but it's what I needed to do to keep my head above water.

I had well over a year basically to myself. My world consisted of just me and my husband, and I was perfectly happy with that. No gatherings. No events. No frivolous interactions with anyone. We used that time to focus on treatment, using the time to plan and set up our next chapter: moving on to donor eggs. I was able to do the mental and emotional work necessary to make that transition in the healthiest way possible. It was hard work, but it would've been more difficult if I had to also deal with the stress of having to put on a brave, smiling face around people who had no idea what I was going through. I was able to have tunnel vision, looking squarely ahead at our goal with nothing to distract us.

But now that the world is opening back up, I have to start moving out of my comfort zone. Venturing out of my shell that has been a safe space for me for so long. I basically took myself out of our community, and the pandemic pushed me even farther. How do I begin to contemplate stepping back into it? And what if I don't want to, at least not yet?

But I know I should, especially for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I need Hashem to hear my pleas, to see my tears. I need to show Him that I have *emunah* (faith) in His ability to do miracles. After the trials of the past year and a half (and then some...), I know it's what my *neshamah* (soul) needs.



Reflecting, Reuniting, and Making Space

Rabbi Michael Bleicher, LCSW, Yesh Tikva's Director of Male Support

The Days of Awe of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are a time when many reflect on the year that was and look ahead to the year that will be. It's been quite a year. A year in which we continued to cope with the pain of the passing of too many relatives and friends. A year in which we continued to cope with the disruption of our normal, pre-pandemic lifestyle. A year in which participants in Yesh Tikva's support group for men reported struggling to cope with policy changes at their infertility specialist's office. Those changes meant they had to wait outside in the car rather than joining their wives at appointments, even while society generally relaxed Covid-related restrictions.

Last year at this time, while praying in synagogues, tent-covered backyards, parking lots and our own living rooms we acknowledged that during the Days of Awe G-d decides, "how many will pass and how many will be born." For one in eight couples, it was yet another year in which the hope and dream of celebrating the birth of a child and growing their family went unfulfilled. Given how much they've had to cope with this year, above and beyond the typical

pandemic-related challenges, we in the community around them have a great opportunity to see their struggle, lend our support and help them keep their hope alive in the year ahead.

As we usher in the New Year by reuniting in person at synagogues and in the homes of family and friends this year, there are at least five things that we can do to make communal settings a more comfortable, supportive and welcome space for those who are in struggle. Couples who struggle with infertility often feel socially isolated. Even before we find our seats next to them in synagogue, simply reaching out by calling, emailing, texting, or dropping off challah with a jar of honey to extend warm wishes for a happy New Year lets them know that you see them and think of them - even if you don't see them in the school drop off line or haven't seen them in the coffee shop in a year and a half. Maybe your remembering them will remind G-d to "remember" them, too!

As you think about them before the holiday, be sure to think about them during the holidays as well.



So second, consider taking an extra moment to include them in your prayers over these special days. Our rabbis teach us that when we pray for others, our prayers may be answered faster. Your day will be that much more meaningful when you add a few sincere words from your heart that aren't in the hundreds of pages of the machzor (prayer book).

Third, if you're on the synagogue seating committee, find a way to assign those struggling with infertility seats that are not adjacent to a family with young children. This will help the couple focus on their prayers more intensely without being distracted by children going in and out during services.

Fourth, for members of the ritual committee, understand that while many members love receiving honors during services and are even willing to pay handsome sums for them, some couples struggling with infertility feel that the honor shines an intrusive and unwelcome spotlight on their struggle. Please still ask, but don't apply pressure if they reject the honor. They'll appreciate you thinking of them and respecting their wish to decline the opportunity and maintain their relative anonymity.

Fifth, invite them for a meal over the holidays while expressly giving them permission to take a raincheck at a less triggering time. Spending the holiday meals alone as a couple may be the quiet solitude some need to cope and recharge after a gut wrenching prayer service.

Others might appreciate the social opportunity and recognition that comes with being 'invited out.' Research shows that when couples struggling with infertility engage in social activities their stress levels decline and their overall health and wellbeing improve – what a great merit to bring with you to the Day of Judgment! Even if they don't accept your offer, invite them over for dessert or tea and listen to what it's been like for them to cope over the past year. By giving them space to express themselves, they'll know they can turn to you again in the future when they need a listening ear or a supportive hug.

Each of us has a role to play in making our community a warmer place for individuals and couples who struggle, especially those struggling with infertility. May our collective efforts permit us to reflect back on "how many will be born" with a broad smile this time next year.

It's Been a Year - What Community Means to Me Now

By Breindy Pattashnick

Even though I am writing this in Mid-June, I know that the High Holidays are approaching soon. My emotional response to this is: I'm terrified.

I'm afraid to go through another Rosh Hashana as a woman without any children. As I am writing, I am reflecting on my feelings and thoughts that I experienced last Rosh Hashana. Last year, the world was in the middle of a global pandemic during the High Holidays. I remember that I was *davening* (praying) my heart and soul out to *Hashem* (God), with a mask on my face. I was praying to *Hashem* to bless me with my baby that I have been dreaming about for so long.

The Coronavirus changed the lives of so many. The world was a scary place to live in. My husband and I received our infertility diagnosis during the pandemic. I spent so much time wondering why I couldn't get pregnant, so when we finally got some insight and answers we had mixed feelings. It was reassuring that the testing found a cause, but at the same time, it was painful to get an infertility diagnosis.

Infertility is a loss. It is the loss of a dream. Each month comes with so much pain.

Last year, on Rosh Hashana, I *davened* that the treatments we were planning on undergoing would work. I was hoping that we would finally have our child within the year. Last Rosh Hashana, I had a spark of hope. I thought that this year would be my year to get pregnant. I had hoped that *Hashem* would finally answer my prayers and tears.

It is now months later, and I stand here today still childless, yet I feel like a completely new person. This is the year I sought out support. This is the year I worked on myself, my mental health, and

my wellbeing. I might not have a baby today, but I will tell you what I do have. I have friendships that I have made through *Yesh Tikva*. We may have different stories, yet we stand together as one. We support each other and show love to one another, as we navigate our stories. We are able to hold each other's pain because we can relate.

We are each waiting to become a mother, to hold our baby, and to have our dreams come true. We carry heavy pain each and every day. However, the pain feels less lonely when we have each other to hold onto. Through *Yesh Tikva*, I was able to gain emotional support, which helped me get through the days, weeks, and months of this year.

So, as I stand in front of *Hashem* for another Rosh Hashana, I am grateful for what I have gained this year. Through the challenge of infertility, I was able to create friendships. I learnt how to support others and I am also trying to spread awareness to the world!

With the support of my friends, I was able to open up about my infertility journey to the public. It is not easy to be vulnerable on social media and yet I feel that it is important to spread awareness. Infertility happens in 1 of 8 couples. I am one person in this world, trying to make a difference in this community. I am one person, trying to support others while going through the journey myself.

I am hoping, praying, and waiting for my precious miracle to come. I am sending love to every couple struggling to have a child. This year on Rosh Hashana, may *Hashem* send a *Yeshua* (salvation) to every couple and may all our *Tefilos* (prayers) be answered for the good!

Holding Hope for My Miracle

By Michal

Around a year ago, we were just getting started on this journey. We hadn't yet received our infertility diagnosis, yet I was hopeful that I wouldn't have to enter this club. I remember last *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, when I was pleading and begging *Hashem* (God) to send me a child. I had so much hope and was praying that I wouldn't need to see the doctor.

A year later, and here we are begging *Hashem* for a miracle. Here we are waiting to hold our child in our arms and become parents.

Last *Rosh Hashana*, I had to go to the *mikvah*. I remember being so upset that I had to go the first night of *Rosh Hashana* and wasn't able to see past it. I was finally able to see that *Hashem* was giving me a new beginning, a new time to ask of him what I needed. It was the perfect time, as the *Yamim Noraim* (Days of Awe) are a time when *shamayim* (heaven) is opened and you can ask *Hashem* for anything and everything. It is the time when your year is decided for you. On *Rosh Hashana*, the Book of Life is opened, and on *Yom Kippur*, the Book of Life is closed. I remember asking *Hashem* to end COVID and to bring me my child. Several months later, we started seeing an infertility specialist where we received our diagnosis.

This past year has been challenging to say the least, as we have been isolated from friends and family, and hiding behind our masks. We have been fortunate to have an amazing support system, but one thing that remains the same is that we are still childless. This past year has taught us that everyone has their struggles, and some are more public, and others like infertility are more private. I have seen pregnancy announcements, birth announcements, and many strollers around the community and still haven't gotten the chance to push my own. I sit here and reflect on how strong I have become this past year. How strong we have become together while we wait for our miracle.

Every month since that first *tevillah* (immersion) of the year, I have gone back to the *mikvah* and have bargained with the fact that maybe *Hashem* did not want me to be a mother yet, but maybe next year. Maybe this next treatment will work. There's this whole community of amazing and incredible women who understand what it is like to fight for a child. This year on *Rosh Hashana*, I will be asking *Hashem* to give me whatever he thinks I can handle and that this time next year, we should all be holding our miracles.

How to use Language of Compassion

Compassionate language occurs when we take a moment to reflect on the experience of the individual we are communicating with and in place of imposing evaluation, judgement or criticism, we respond with empathy.

According to Brene Brown: "Empathy is a way to connect to the emotion another person is experiencing; it doesn't require that we have experienced the same situation they are going through." It is a means of connecting with people so they know they are not alone in their struggle.

Empathy does not mean always knowing what to say. At times stating that you want to lend support but do not know what words to use can be the most empathetic response. The most important thing to remember is that statements of empathy do not start with the words, "At least..." Silver lining statements that begin with "at least" help the speaker feel better about the situation, not the person being comforted.

Compassionate language is not second nature to most of us. In order to use it, we must practice it. The following are some examples of reactionary language, and alternatives that you can use in the form of compassionate language.

You are sitting around with friends this Rosh Hashanah and someone tells you that they have been struggling for a few years to achieve a successful pregnancy and are undergoing fertility treatment.

You want to respond to them and convey compassion.

Instead of saying: "Oh no that is horrible"

Consider these three alternatives that convey compassion

- 1 I am here to listen if you want to share.
- 2 I wish things were easier for you.
- 3 I am sorry that you (both) are going through this. It really sucks

You want to respond to them and convey support.

Instead of saying: "You've got this"

Consider three alternatives that convey support

- 1 I want you to know that I am open to listening if you choose to share.
- 2 I would like to be there for you (both), is there something specific I may help with?
- 3 I know it's a small thing, but may I check in with you during the week just so you know you are on my mind?

Are you finding their words hard to read? I have a hard time too.

I lived it.

As do 1 in 8 women and men.

Which is why we founded Yesh Tikva.

Creating community for those in struggle and ensuring
that no one faces this diagnosis alone.

If reading their words moves you to do something,
one thing you can do is consider giving, consider volunteering
and consider reciting The Fertility Prayer on their behalf.

-Gila

The Fertility Prayer

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּה, שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ, וּבִרְדָּךְ אֶת כָּל חַשׁוּכֵי הַיָּלָדִים
פְּקָדִים לְטוֹבָה, וְיוֹלִידוּ בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת, וְרָעָא חַיָּא וְקִיָּמָא.

עַיִן נוֹשָׂאִים הֵם לְךָ לְשִׁמְיָם, לֵב שׁוֹפְכִים נִכְחָד כְּמוֹם. חֲזָקָם וְאִמְצָם, וְגִמְלָם חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים,
וְשִׁלַּח לָהֶם רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה וְתֵן לָהֶם שְׁלוֹת הַנֶּפֶשׁ

וּכְשֶׁם שֶׁפָּקַדְתָּ אֶת שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל וְחַנָּה, וְשָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל הַצְדִּיקִים וְהַצְדִּיקוֹת בְּשׁוֹעַם אֱלֹהֶיךָ, כֵּן תִּשְׁמָע לְקוֹל
תַּחֲנוּנֵינוּ. מִלֹּא מוֹשְׁאֵלוֹת לָבֶם לְטוֹבָה, וּמִכָּל בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרָצוֹן אֶת תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ. וְכֵן יְהִי רְצוֹן, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן

May it be Your will God, our Lord and the Lord of our forefathers, who answers prayers, hear our
prayers and bless all those who struggle to have children. Remember them for good and with
Your mercy they shall have sons and daughters, and grant them enduring offspring.

They lift up their eyes to You in heaven, they pour forth their hearts before You as water. Strengthen
them and give them courage, grant them abundant kindness, heal them and help them find peace.

As you remembered Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Hannah, and You have heard the voices of
the righteous men and women when they beseeched You, so too please listen to our outcry
(to help the men and women of our community). Fulfill our wishes for good and accept with
Your mercy and desire our prayers. And so may it be Your will, and let us say Amen.

The Hebrew prayer was edited by Dr Yael Levine



dedication page

Thank you to our
generous supporters

Beth Ann Locke

Cindy and Dr. Noam Drazin

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Learn more about Yesh Tikva's services and work

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