

- 1:6. See also discussion in *Minbat Hinukh*, *mitsvat ase* 1, of this and other related opinions.
7. Cf. *Iggerot Moshe*, *ibid.* based on *Tosafot*, *Bava Batra* 13a, s.v. *kofin*, and see *Minbat Yitshak*, *ibid.* and *Tsits Eli'ezer*, *ibid.*
8. *Berakhot* 5b.
9. *Bava Batra* 10b.
10. *Shevu'ot*
11. Cf. *Berakhot* 60a; *Targum Yonatan*, Genesis 30:21. 33.

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The desperate desire for a son or daughter coupled with growing availability of sophisticated reproductive technology may propel observant Jews to consult rabbis (or other religiously invested persons) regarding the halakhic permissibility of pre-implantation gender selection. This is rarely a neutral topic. Mention of sex selection for any purpose other than avoiding devastating genetically-linked diseases tends to elicit discomfort, even among the most liberal minded. Persons who rally to pro-choice platforms confess feeling frissons of revulsion when asked to contemplate reproductive interventions to achieve gender preference. Strikingly, eradication of undesired conception, i.e., abortion, often registers less disturbance than does elective manipulation of the raw materials of life to create a more desired child.

On the broad social landscape, issues of sex discrimination, societal gender balance, and resource allocation deserve consideration. Preferences regarding gender vary among cultures. China and India are infamous for eliminating millions of females from their populations through use of ultrasound and abortion. On the other hand, United States prospective parents seeking to adopt, perhaps motivated by notions of girls being “easier to raise,” overwhelmingly (80%) prefer girls.¹

At the personal level, observant Jews seeking pre-implantation genetic intervention may invoke religious motives for seeking to conceive either gender. “Family balancing” takes on the additional valence of interpreting the commandment “to be fruitful and multiply” as directing a man to ideally sire both male and female children. The unique issues of

yibud and *Kohen* status evoked by artificial insemination, outlined above by Drs. Grazi and Wolowelsky, also come into consideration.

All of the above issues point to why here, as on all emotionally charged issues, the rabbi must first examine his own heart. The overview to this discussion summarizes the general tone of rabbinic disapproval regarding sex selection. Knowledge of the specific arguments and sources informing this disapproval is surely critical to rabbinic involvement. If, however, a rabbi confines his response to the parameters of the manifest *she'eilah*, he will have missed an invaluable opportunity to explore the underlying latent issues inherent in such a question. At the core of the matter are the couple's individual and shared fantasies of what conceiving a son or daughter means to them.

Only by carefully monitoring his own "emotional temperature" and coming to terms with his gut reactions and feelings can a rabbi effectively guide a couple through the religious and psychological complexities of gender choice. How does the rabbi feel about the composition of his own family of origin and of the family he has created with his wife? What measure of joy or disappointment has he experienced in these intimate spheres? Does the rabbi recoil at the notion of gender selection? Does he regard it as the first descent on the slippery ethical slope of "designer" babies or does he admire the potential of scientific progress to allow for maximally desired children?

What is the state of the congregants' marriage? Do husband and wife appear to be in synch about utilization of sex selection? If the congregants asking about pre-implantation genetic selection cite *peru u-revu* as their motivation, should the rabbi reflect on whether the couples' scrupulosity concerning this mitzva is consonant with the rest of their religious practice? Should he help them consider why they have chosen to focus on this particular commandment above others?

What are the couples' expectations of the son or daughter they wish to conceive? If they want a boy, do they hope that he will be pious, studious, athletic, handsome, or "like his grandfather"? What if pre-implantation genetics succeeds in producing a son who turns out to be irreligious, a poor student, uncoordinated, homely and nothing like his *zayide*? Will his mother and father be able to ascribe their son's character to the uncertainty that comes with all parenthood or will they regret that they tinkered with nature? How will their disappointment affect their son and his older sisters?

By no means should the rabbi barrage the couple with an exhaustive inventory of the above questions. Rather, an awareness of the

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breadth of potential inquiry should inform his listening once he asks, in his own language, the opening question, "Tell me how the two of you came to consider pre-implantation genetics for gender selection?" Only by plumbing his own depths can a rabbi provide the necessary environment of compassionate yet active listening required in such a sensitive matter. Such examination will surely help a couple clarify the driving forces motivating such a significant potential deployment of medical intervention and help them to come to a religiously sanctified decision.

NOTES

1. <http://www.comeunity.com/adoption/boys/index.htm>.

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