

A LONG PATH TO

MOTHERHOOD

YEARS OF ANGUISH, YEARS OF HOPE

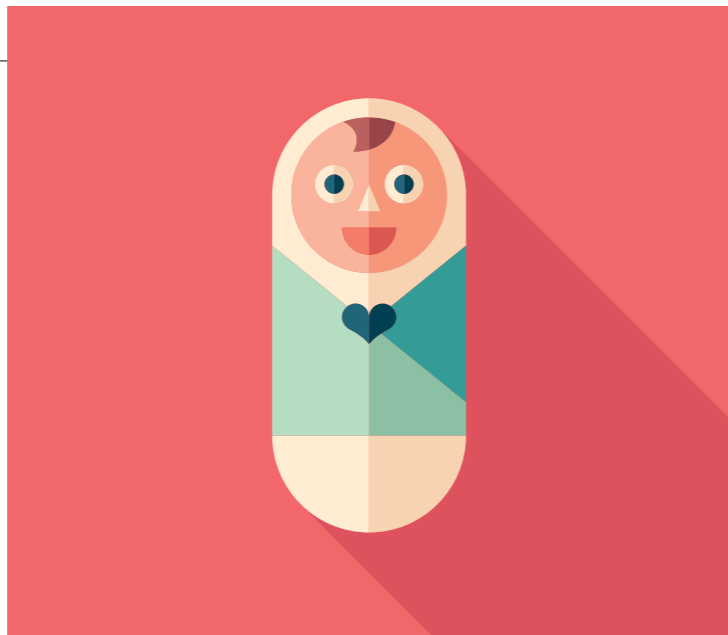
AS TOLD TO DARLENE BRILL

Like most people, my husband and I envisioned our lives following a typical path: marriage and then children. Of course, we knew about friends of friends, distant relatives and others for whom things had turned out differently. But for some reason, we didn't think it was cause for concern.

Right after our wedding in London we moved to Israel, where my husband was learning in *kollel*. Even though we'd only been married a couple of months I was very disappointed that I wasn't pregnant. Perhaps I had a sixth sense of the troubles to come.

As the months turned into years and I still wasn't pregnant, my mood plummeted lower and lower. My husband, Moishe, would try to comfort me by telling me about couples who had been married a lot longer than we were and went on to have large families. But the years of waiting and hoping followed by dashed dreams and tears—not to mention wondering why everyone had been blessed except us—felt like an eternity. As more time passed, Moishe's words began to ring hollow. They couldn't heal my pain, nor could they quell my unfathomable, constant yearning for a child.





Nonetheless, whenever I was in agony, desperately seeking comfort, my husband would try his best to dispense advice, saying things like “Why don’t you try to relax? I’ve heard that stress can aggravate infertility.” He didn’t mean to be insensitive. But the truth is that I would have felt so much better if he had validated my feelings, simply saying, “This is really miserable. I hope it ends soon.”

First concerns

Sometime around our third anniversary we decided to seek medical help. We hoped that all we needed was a little assistance, some pills that would do the trick. The first three doctors we went to were either not really fertility specialists or were very narrow-minded with regard to balancing treatment with *halachab*. By the time we found an appropriate doctor we had already moved back to London.

People often think that going two or three years without children isn’t so terrible. After all, some couples wait for five, ten or even 20 years! But thinking back, I remember having a very hard time dealing with the whole issue. I couldn’t bear the repetitive cycle of hoping for good news only to have my hopes dashed. I also had a hard time coming to terms with the idea that we would probably need medical assistance in order to have a child. In a sense, I lived better with infertility many years later, after I had no more expectations.

The first doctor we used was very expensive and he wasn’t a great communicator, but since he had a good reputation, we decided to keep consulting him. After numerous tests failed to uncover any particular issue, he suggested that we begin a very basic treatment. We attempted to do this four times, only to realize that while infertility is difficult for anyone, it is even more of a hardship for *frum* Jews who are determined to strictly follow *halachab*.

I remember crying in the doctor’s office when he told me that the next step would require a more invasive approach. Like many other couples, we perceived it as interfering with the normal cycle of life. How naïve and innocent were we! If we had known what the other options were down the road, we would have been very happy to settle for that. In retrospect, it was probably best that we didn’t know. I later heard from a *gadol* who is close to my husband’s family that babies born nowadays to childless couples are greater *nissim* than the *mofsim* of earlier generations.

New horizons

After three years of marriage, we moved to London, fervently hoping that *meshaneh makom, meshaneh mazal*. But when the months continued to pass and the good news we were hoping for failed to materialize, we began to seek help from one of the best fertility clinics in Israel. Dealing with a fertility center abroad meant that the treatment had to be planned well in advance. It also meant making people believe that you were going off to enjoy a month of carefree vacation time in Israel, as well as somehow finding a way to finance it. The treatment we were offered wasn’t extremely sophisticated, and we could have obtained it locally. But Israel’s greater expertise, as well as comprehensive knowledge of the

halachic challenges involved, led us to choose that option. Not wanting to tell anyone what we were doing, parents included, we decided to spend our meager savings to cover the cost.

It didn’t take long for our credit cards to be maxed out. I was never comfortable to ask friends or relatives for financial assistance, we ended up a whopping £33,000 in debt. It always enraged us when people made casual comments about how much money we must have; after all, we had no babysitting expenses or diapers to purchase!

The treatment in Eretz Yisrael was painful, much worse than I expected. I couldn’t bring myself to administer all the needles, and Moishe had to hire someone to do it. Then there were the medications, with their side effects and mood swings that I couldn’t control. On top of that, there was the weight gain. Only then, when everything was finally over, did the waiting game begin, back in London.

When I took the final blood test one morning at 7 a.m.—the one that would actually show the results—I just knew that it was going to be good. I couldn’t explain why, but I was euphoric. I could already feel the new heart (or did I dare to imagine, hearts?) beating inside me. I practically skipped to the car on the way home. We only had to wait a few hours for the phone call, but as those hours dragged on, I began vacillating between my initial excitement

“Nothing works out until you have a healthy baby in your arms. Remember that, and never stop praying for it.”

and another thought, which I tried pushing away. I kept pacing the kitchen floor in our small rented flat, prompting Moishe to suggest that I take a nap, as I certainly hadn’t gotten much sleep over the past couple of weeks. Reluctantly, I agreed. I had just gotten into bed when my phone rang. Without even bothering to check the caller ID, I grabbed the phone and shouted breathlessly, “Hello!”

“Is this Mrs. Schuchman?” the voice said, sounding awfully cheery.

“Speaking.”

“I’m calling on behalf of Oiraisa Avreichim. We just launched our first major

fundraising campaign. As you know, we distribute monthly stipends for *yungeleit*. Hundreds of *chiddushei Torah* have already been written thanks to our efforts, and we were wondering if you would be kind enough to help us with a donation of £36?”

By now I was feeling anxious. I didn’t have call waiting on this phone. What would happen if the nurse tried to get through and encountered a busy signal?

“I’m sorry, I really can’t help you right now,” I said abruptly.

“Then can we count on you for a donation of £18? It would be very helpful.”

“No!” I practically shouted as I slammed

down the phone. A minute later I felt terrible, but there was no way I could have explained my situation to a stranger.

Eventually I did fall asleep, and remained so for two solid hours until the jarring sound of my phone, ringer turned up high, woke me up. This time it was Moishe who answered it in the kitchen. I heard him say, “Why don’t you tell her yourself? I’m sure she’d want to hear it from you.”

“Mrs. Schuchman,” the voice said when he handed me phone, “This is the nurse at Dr. G.’s office. I know you’ve already seen me too many times in your life. Well, hopefully you won’t have to see me for too much longer!”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked.

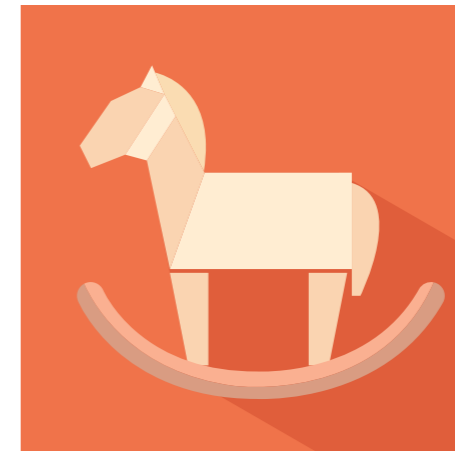
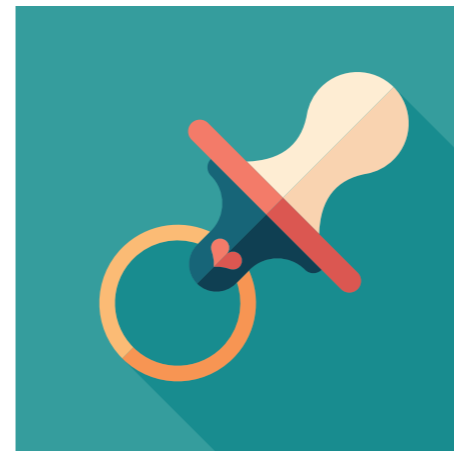
“In case you didn’t realize it, I have some very good news for you.”

“You mean... You mean that I’m...” I couldn’t even bring herself to say the word.

“Yes, that’s what your Beta hCG levels are showing. The numbers are indicating a pregnancy.”

Her tone then became business-like. “I’m going to connect you to W., our secretary. Tell her you need a sonogram, check-up and blood work to be done in four days. See you then!”

“Thank you so much,” I whispered. I didn’t trust my voice. My mind was whirling. After



All of the pent-up emotions I'd struggled to contain for so long suddenly broke loose as I hurled my shoes across the living room.

five long years we were finally going to have a baby. There were so many questions I still wanted to ask. "Oh, and good luck. I really hope it works out well for you."

I found my voice. "It already worked out well, didn't it?"

"Honey, nothing works out until you have a healthy baby in your arms. Remember that, and never stop praying for it."

I would remember those words clearly in the days to come. At the time, however, my whole being was aglow with the ecstasy of the moment. I looked up and saw Moishe standing in the doorway, a huge smile on his face. No words were necessary.

I scheduled my first visit and was thankful that everything seemed fine. But it wasn't until a week later, during my next visit to the doctor, that the miracle became more real when the nurse pointed out a few dots on the computer screen and told me they were the head and body of my baby! Never before had I felt such love or tenderness for anything in my life. I held my breath, and could scarcely draw my eyes away from it. I accepted the funny black-and-white print-out with glee, even though all that could be seen to the untrained eye were some blobs.

In the coming days and weeks I couldn't remember feeling happier—or more nervous. Moishe and I carefully guarded our secret, though at times I felt I would burst if I didn't tell anyone. But we decided to not even tell our parents until a few more weeks had elapsed. I could only imagine the look on their faces, and could hardly wait. Meanwhile, I tried to my best to contend with my violent morning sickness, reminding myself that I'd waited so long for it and wouldn't complain.

Nine weeks into the pregnancy I had my first visit at The Royal Free Hospital in London's antenatal ward. Everything looked fine, so we decided that the time had come to tell our parents. When we told Moshe's mother the news it was greeted by silence—followed by wrenching sobs. She couldn't talk. Her reaction was proof of the terrible emotional pain she'd experienced all those years, watching us suffer but being powerless to help. Moishe needed a few minutes to compose himself after that. Then it was my turn to call my mother.

"Oh, Ruchi!" she exclaimed. "What wonderful news! I'm so excited! I can't believe it! How far along are you? I was so worried. Do you think I can tell Tante Rosy? Please? She'll be so happy! She's always asking about you. And Bubby—you really have to tell her. You'll make her whole week. And what about Esti and—"

"No," I interrupted her firmly. "Nobody. We aren't telling anyone else until it's time for me to put on maternity clothes. Please respect our privacy."

"Oh." My mother sounded deflated, like a balloon that had just lost all its air. "Well, can I at least tell Tatty?"

"Yes, but that's it. And make sure that he doesn't tell anyone else."

I doubted my mother's ability to keep the news quiet for more than a few days—which was why we had always been unwilling to share any of the details of our treatments with our parents. Although it certainly helped keep meddlesome questions and comments at bay, my silence had surely caused them more than a bit of suffering over the years.

The next couple of weeks passed by in a blur. I was constantly sick and tired, and there

were many days when I needed to stay home from work. In addition, Moishe now had to shoulder a great deal of the household responsibilities. Nobody minded, though. We both knew it was only a temporary phase, and besides, it was for the best possible reason. Slowly, I began to feel a little better. I returned to work and spent hours browsing in maternity and baby shops, knowing that it was much too early to begin buying those things but unable to resist the temptation to look.

At the beginning of the second trimester I dutifully made my way to the fifth floor of the Royal Free Hospital for a routine check-up. This time, I allowed Moishe to remain home, a sign of growing confidence in our situation. I can't say exactly when I began to have a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach, but it was some time during the hour-long wait to see the doctor. As the minutes passed, the feeling turned into something concrete: stomach cramps. My heart began to pound. I was taking deep breaths to dispel my dizziness when thankfully I heard my name being called.

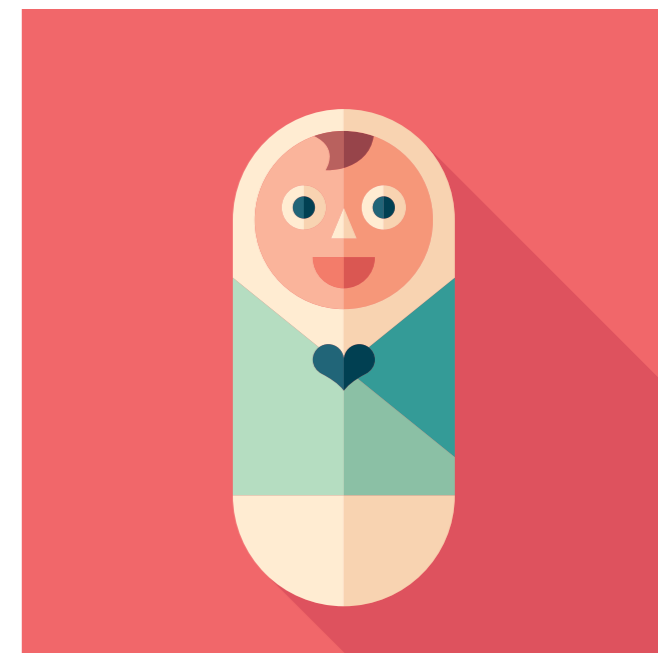
The nurse began the routine of locating the baby's heart-beat, the sound I had come to enjoy more than any other in the world. But there was only silence in the room, broken by the hum of the fluorescent lights and the ticking of the clock. I clenched my fists as a fear so thick that I could almost taste it began to rise in me. I had waited five years for this baby! I couldn't lose it now!

A minute later the nurse explained that my baby had been dead for a full week. In an instant, my world grew dark. All I wanted was for the earth to swallow me up and stop the pain that was roaring through me like a burning fire. Robotically, I made my way home. "Hashem," I cried, "I'm so hurt! It's bad enough that You made me infertile and I had to learn to make peace with that. But now You took my baby away from me! Am I such a bad person? You couldn't spare just one healthy child? Why must You tease me like this?"

All of the pent-up emotions I'd struggled to contain for so long suddenly broke loose. I took off my shoes and hurled them across the living room. "I'm so angry, so angry, so angry."

It was there that Moishe found me a half hour later, weeping in anger and grief. □

Concludes next week.





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PART TWO

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RECAP: For the first three years of their marriage, a young couple has no success in starting a family. They try different treatments in the UK and in Israel, exhausting their savings and testing their faith. Finally there is good news, but they are devastated when there is a miscarriage at four months.

At that point, my husband Moishe and I realized that we had to find another couple who were going through the same rollercoaster ride as we were. I needed to talk to someone who understood what it was like. Then I remembered my old friend from seminary, Rivki. I had heard through the grapevine that, like us, she had been married for quite a few years and was still childless. Within minutes I found myself dialing her number. To my astonishment, I learned that she suffered from the same condition as ours! She and her husband, Ezra, quickly became part of our lives. To my surprise, I began to feel as if life was actually worth living again. I was amazed by the difference a good friend could make.

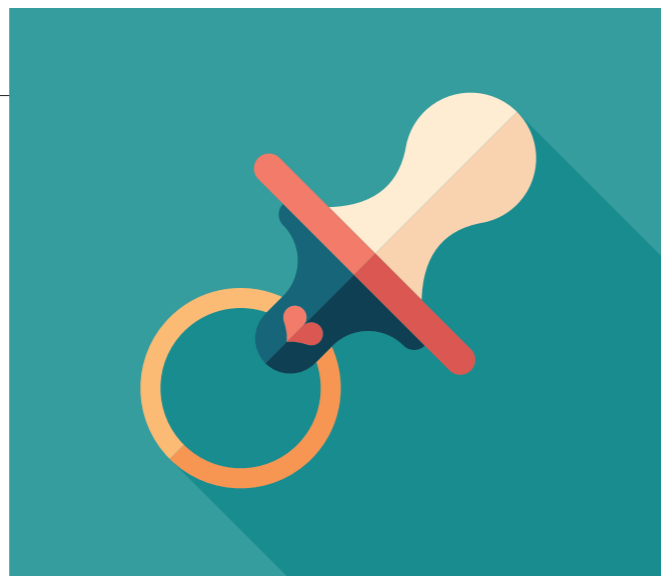
Shortly after I reconnected with Rivki, she disclosed that all of her treatments were being funded by the local Bonei Olam branch in Manchester. In fact, in the near future she would be flying to New York to see a world-renowned fertility expert there who had one of the highest rates of success in the world. His £35,000 fee would be totally covered. At first I felt dejected. Why was she telling me about doctors and treatments to which I had no access?

A few months later, Ezra called my husband to tell him that Rabbi Shlomo Bochner, the founder of Bonei Olam, who lives in New York, would be visiting Manchester to attend a dinner. Moishe and I decided

to go, and we stayed in a hotel on the outskirts of Prestwich. In the end, I didn't have the courage to attend, but my husband did.

Sitting through the inspiring program, Moishe felt himself feeling calmer. But when he heard what would turn out to be the final speech given by the legendary *askan* Abba Dunner, z"l, he broke down, remembering the *hesped* he'd delivered for his son Benzy just a short time before on Shushan Purim. Abba Dunner had then cried, "Hashem, I know we aren't allowed to ask questions, but I can't help myself. *Why?* Why did this happen to me and my family?" Now Abba was adding, "It would be sad to think that money decides who has a child and who doesn't. Money can decide which car we buy or which clothes we wear, but why should it determine whether or not I have a child? Is that how important *gasb-miyus* is to us? Bonei Olam says absolutely not! If *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wants you to have a child, money won't present an obstacle." My husband started to sob and left the room. It was all too much for him.

After the dinner, Ezra approached Rabbi Bochner and gave him a thumbnail sketch of our grim medical history. Rabbi Bochner told him that our best bet was to come to New York to see a certain doctor who was on the cutting edge of fertility treatments. The next morning, someone from Bonei Olam arranged for us to meet with one of Bonei Olam's counselors in Golders Gardens, a woman named Miri, right around the corner



from where we live. Once we did, we no longer had to worry about how we were going to finance our medical bills! It was a G-dsend. Miri immediately calmed me like no one else could. She treated us with a degree of kindness that we had never encountered before on our journey.

Sometime later, Rabbi Bochner mentioned to her that “almost the entire income from the dinner in Manchester” was going to be dedicated to helping us.

A few months passed, and it was time for our friends Rivki and Ezra to travel to New York. When Rabbi Bochner introduced them to the doctor, he said, “This couple may have come to see you from overseas, but you should know that an entire community of 500 people came out to wish them well. It’s like one big family.” The doctor was amazed.

Unfortunately, their hopes were once again dashed when the cutting-edge treatment failed to yield results. It was a real let-down. They were therefore shocked when the doctor woke them up in the middle of the night and told them to hop on a train and go back to the hospital in

Manhattan! Still half-asleep, they did as they were told.

It turned out that this world-renowned doctor had personally gone to the lab in middle of the night to study the pathology report to see if there was anything he could do for them. Seeing the results, he decided that there was still another chance.

Nine months later, Rabbi Bochner called the doctor to tell him that Rivki and Ezra had become the proud parents of a healthy baby. The doctor was extremely moved. “When you told me that the whole town had come to see the couple off,” he explained, “I knew that I had to do more than the usual. How could I let so many people down?”

But as much as I was genuinely overjoyed for Rivki, I was back on my own, without a close friend with whom to share. This time, Bonei Olam referred me to a clinic in my own backyard on Great Portland Street. At least I was spared the aggravation of having to travel abroad again.

The treatment went quite smoothly. There was a good response and our hopes were really high. I never imagined that during my first hour-long consultation with Mr. Paul Serhal, Bonei Olam’s medical director, he would spend over half of the time discussing *halachah* with us! Unfortunately, two weeks after the procedure, the results came back negative. After all the efforts

involved, we were very disappointed. Nevertheless, we tried to put things into perspective, reminding ourselves that every treatment was estimated to have only a 15% to 25% chance of success. Our first local experience helped us understand the challenges of the process. I had one unpleasant experience when a nurse hurt my arm very badly while attempting to draw blood. It was quickly covered with bruises, and I was unable to move it for a few days.

Sadly, shortly after this attempt, my husband became seriously ill and suffered from several illnesses in rapid succession. He lost a considerable amount of weight and looked very pale. After a couple of months, he slowly started to recover and we were able to go ahead with our next treatment in the local fertility center.

More difficulties

You can therefore imagine our disappointment when the results proved to be so poor that even more sophisticated procedures would have been impossible to perform. For the first time, we were filled

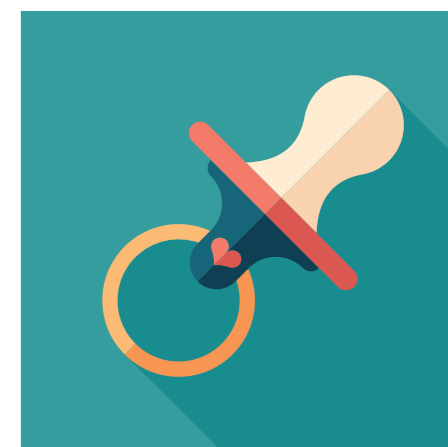
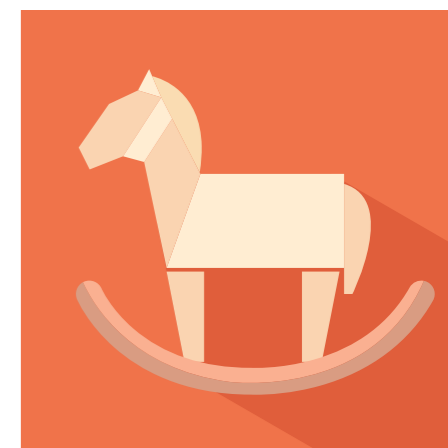
with true despair.

I would later notice that bad news often arrived on sunny days, as if the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, in His kindness, wanted to soften the blow. I couldn’t help but remember how Yosef was sent to Egypt with a caravan carrying fragrant spices rather than the foul-smelling cargo of naphtha and tar that they usually carried. Just as Hashem showed His care for Yosef even in times of hardship, I always felt His presence supporting us at every step.

We didn’t realize at the time that Moishe’s bad health during the previous months could have explained this sad outcome. It was only later, when trying to investigate the cause, that we realized that that probably explained it.

Back to Israel

By the time summer arrived, Moishe had recovered enough that we could attempt a new treatment. Dr. Peter Schlegel, who had been the right *shaliach* for Rivki and Ezra, began making biannual trips to Israel to treat Bonei Olam couples. Naturally, there



SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF COUPLES STRUGGLING WITH INFERTILITY

| Let the couple know (in private) that you are there for them. Make yourself available, but after that, do not pry! Let them take the lead. Do not ask for more information than you are offered.

| It is generally unwise to offer unsolicited advice. While you think you know what’s going on with the couple, 99% of the time you have no clue. You may be suggesting a specialist who doesn’t even deal with that couple’s particular problem, or perhaps they’ve already gone to him. If you feel you have something important to share, let the couple know privately that you have some information they may find useful, and leave it up to them to ask you for it or not.

| Never pass on any information about the couple without consulting them first.

| Do not make comments about the couple’s finances. A single treatment can cost a whole year’s salary, if not more.

| If you have a child who is struggling with fertility issues, resist the temptation to comment. What you can say is, “We care about you and respect your privacy. We trust that you are doing whatever needs to be done, and we are sure that you have good people advising you. If there is anything you wish to share with us or if you need any help, please don’t hesitate to do so. The door is always open.”

| It is perfectly fine to talk about your children to people who are childless. No one wants you to walk on eggshells. However, try not to let the entire conversation be dominated by discussions of pregnancy and children, especially in a group setting.

| Do not make comments like “You’re so lucky that you have this time together.” They are very belittling and will not make the couple feel any better.

| There is no need to mention every *segulah* in the book to the couple. Although a few people will appreciate it, most will not. You can also ruin their time at a *simchah* when they are trying to enjoy themselves and forget their problems. Try

to be sensitive when letting the couple know about your own pregnancy, but don’t hide it from them. Tell them at the same time you tell all your other relatives and friends.

| Be sensitive to your employees who may be struggling with infertility. If they need to take off some time from work, it is probably for a very good reason. Give them as much leeway as you can, but never pry.

| In general, try to think: Would I want this done to me? Be very honest when answering this question. Most sticky situations could be avoided if people would just think before talking! Do your best—and daven to Hashem!



was always a long waiting list to be seen by him. Due to our grave situation, my counselor Miri secured us a slot.

This time, the treatment would be more complicated, involving a surgical procedure under anaesthesia to retrieve biological samples. All in all, we spent five weeks in Israel, during which we were very positive and hopeful. By then I was 28 years old and things were looking up.

Following the procedure, I was terrified to move. Having to be ferried about by crazy Israeli taxi drivers who refused to slow down certainly didn't make it any easier! After we flew back to England I went back to work, which wasn't easy because I was suffering from hyperstimulation, a painful condition that sometimes follows this particular treatment. We also found it hard to cope with the many inevitable comments about our long stay in Israel. But we were full of hope and could bear anything. That is, until about ten days post-transfer, when we found out that we were back to square one.

Trying again

Four months later, around Chanukah time, we decided to try again. This time we were determined to shorten our stay in Israel as much as possible, so a lot of the preliminary tests were performed in a clinic in North London, only a half-hour's drive from my house.

The course of this second round of treatment under Dr. Shlegel was similar to the last. We were one of 15 other lucky couples. As I was sitting in the waiting room, I resolved then and there that if Hashem helped me and I became a parent, I would publicize my story in *Ami*, my favorite magazine, to give *chizzuk* to others in the same situation.

The treatment itself was successful, but nothing ultimately came out of it. I can still remember the acute pain I felt after speaking with the doctor. We had hit rock bottom.

My heart ached so much that for a few days I didn't care if I lived or died—and we still had to hide our pain from the family with whom we were staying. I even had to fake being happy when my mother gave me the news that my sister-in-law was expecting. Talk about bad timing!

The specific problem we faced was extremely rare, especially given our young age. The fertility center specialist acknowledged that she had never seen a case like ours. We were originally referred to her with a single issue after five years of unexplained infertility, only to discover during the second treatment that we had a second problem, as well. She did not have a solution for us, and it seemed rather clear that she doubted that we would ever become parents.

Not giving up

A couple of months after our return home, I started looking into adoption, but Moishe didn't feel ready for that yet. He just wanted to forget about the whole issue for a while and maybe consider medical treatment at some point in the future. Besides, I quickly realized that the adoption process was very difficult and that our financial situation simply didn't allow for it. It took us a long time to feel strong enough to consider new treatments. In fact, it took an entire year before we were even able to entertain the notion that different laboratory conditions and protocols might lead to better results.

With the help of someone who worked in one of the best fertility centers in Paris, France, we managed to get on the waiting list for an appointment in six months' time. As is often the case, in many facilities the doctors will insist upon repeating the same tests that were done elsewhere. So for several months I had to travel back and forth between the two countries while also juggling my job. When summer finally arrived, it was time to begin treatment. We tried to overcome our apprehension that not only were we in a foreign country, but the head of the department seemed entirely too confident.

The initial part of the treatment showed the same excellent results as those in Israel. But once again, everything fell apart after only a few short weeks. The once very optimistic head of the department had to admit that he was no better than the Israeli team. His only advice was to pursue adoption.

At this point, we felt that we had reached a dead end. Given the extent of our despair, we really didn't know what to do. Even the best fertility specialists in the world were unable to explain or treat our condition. Nevertheless, a few months later we were again contacted by Bonei Olam. "After all," the ever-cheerful Miri reminded us, "over 400 British couples (8,000 worldwide) have already become parents thanks to Bonei Olam's efforts. Why not you, as well?"

After a relatively long period of thinking it over, we readied ourselves for another round of treatments, this time in the United States.

Darkness and light

Simchas Torah is one of the happiest days on the Jewish calendar, but for us it was torture. When you don't have children, all you can do is put on a brave face even though you'd much rather stay at home. In fact, that year was the very first time that my husband couldn't face being in our *shul* during *Kol Hane'arim*, when all the boys under bar mitzvah gather under a humongous *chuppah* held up by 16 poles.

Prior to this new round of treatments, we made sure that the fertility specialist appreciated the complexity of our case. Nonetheless, he still seemed confident that our case could be handled by his team. The

logistics were quite complex. We were very closely monitored and had to drive to the center nearly every day at 5 a.m. Then, not only did treatment day fall out on a Shabbos, but there was a huge storm that knocked out power in the entire region.

The process went well, as usual, but the outcome was worse than ever. I remember the horrifying feeling of being a tree that could only produce rotten fruit. Our case was so exceptional that the doctor in a leading fertility research facility in New Jersey offered to treat us for free, in the hope of benefiting other couples. By then, Bonei Olam had already spent a whopping £80,000 on us.

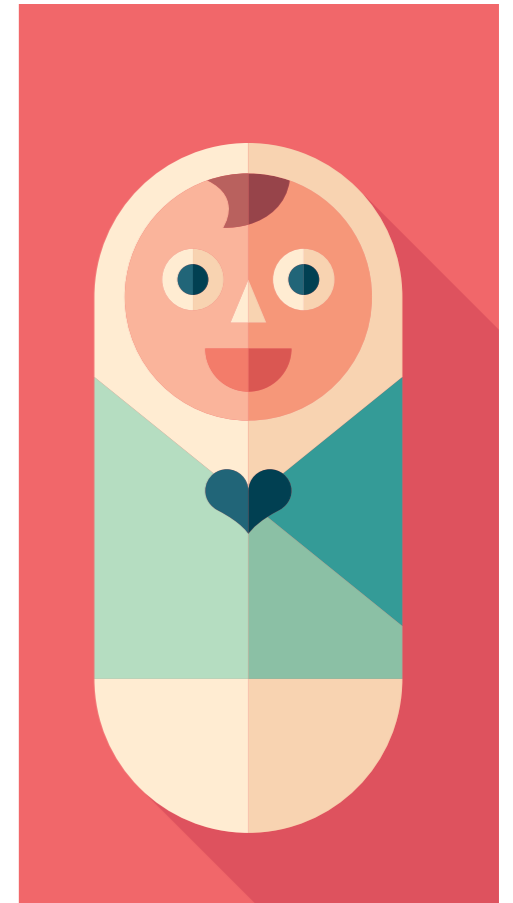
The likelihood of success was very low. The doctor even added that he would advise his own children to stop treatments if they

were in our situation.

My family had a special bond with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, *zt"l*, and we went to his *ohel to daven* and find comfort several times during our stay. During the treatment, our *tefillos* were full of hope. Now, however, we were sinking into the abyss of despair. All we could do was pray from the depths of our souls that the *Ribono Shel Olam* would find a way to comfort us. It was in this state of mind that we left the United States and the prospect of any further treatment.

Turning the page

Upon our return, we started wondering if maybe we should try to forget our longing for children and invest ourselves in other challenges. But we quickly realized that it





wasn't so simple to turn the page. After much consideration, we decided to start looking into new ways of becoming parents that until now we had refused to consider.

With the guidance of our *rav*, we began to re-examine adoption. It took us some time to find the right place. It was very difficult from a psychological point of view, but at least we would have a baby, even though not in the way we'd hoped.

In early Kislev we traveled abroad to discuss the formalities that were involved. I clearly remember that it was the week of *Parshas Vayeitzei*, in which Rachel gives Bilhah to Yaakov Avinu out of despair so that her maid's child would become hers. The trip was uneventful, and we somehow found peace in the quiet place by the sea where we were staying. A few weeks later we were contacted again by our correspondents. The required third party had been identified, and the process could be initiated. We had a few days to make up our minds whether to go ahead with it or not, but we decided to pay the initial fees to launch the process. We were about to give our consent when I was contacted once again by Bonei Olam and told that Professor Ahron Peretz had come to London and was seeing patients at the Great Portland Street Clinic. Reluctantly, we decided to see him and undergo treatment.

It seemed like a foolish thing to do. To my utter confusion, for the first time in over ten years, my test was positive. Our first thought was that the test had to be defective, but we still needed to know what it was all about. That is when I started to feel really nervous and skeptical, finding a thousand reasons why the test was wrong.

A ray of hope

The next obvious step was to do a blood test, but that was more easily said than done, because it was a public holiday and

everything was closed. So I went to the emergency room and a nurse very kindly agreed to perform one. A few hours later my voice was shaking when I called the hospital. The results had come back showing that I might already be further down the line than I had thought!

This seemed so impossible that we couldn't believe it. We managed to book a scan for a couple of days later. Only that would really tell us what was going on.

After a terrible wait, the day of the scan finally arrived. We were both very nervous waiting in the room with everyone else. Then it was our turn. It was very hard to endure, considering that all of our previous experiences had been heartbreaking. Then the nurse said, "No worries, dearie. Everything seems to be okay. Here is the beating heart." The nurse didn't understand why we were weeping until we shared our history. They were tears of joy, but also tears of painful memories.

In fact, I refused to get my hopes up for quite some time, even after we saw my hCG levels doubling and doubling. It wasn't until Week 23 that we started to get the feeling that this time it was real! Nonetheless, we still made sure not to get too overjoyed until the moment of truth.

Our beautiful, healthy daughter was born on the eighth day of Pesach, which is a celebration of Hashem's salvation against all natural odds. That was when the *Ribbono Shel Olam* decided to give us an extraordinary gift that no doctor would ever believe. Holding our daughter for the first time, I could read in her eyes, "Mummy, Daddy, why are you crying? I'm here now."

After our parents, the second phone call we made was to Rivki, who was busy making a *Chumash seudah* for her now five-year-old son.

May the *Ribbono Shel Olam* answer the *tefillos* of all childless couples and bring them joy. *Hodu laShem ki tov, ki Y'olam chasdo!* □