

The Weekly Daf



by Rav Mendel Weinbach - Dean, Ohr Somayach Institutions

Shabbos 128-134

Week of 10-16 Nisan 5758 / 6-12 April 1998
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

A Psychological Emergency

A woman during childbirth is considered as being in a situation where her life is in danger and it is therefore permitted to attend to all her needs on Shabbos even if this involves violating the Shabbos. This includes not only her obvious medical needs but also her psychological ones as well because they too can have an impact on her survival.

This finds expression in the statement of our *gemara* that if she is giving birth at night her friend may light a candle for her. This rule, explains the *gemara*, extends even to a blind woman giving birth. Even though she will not be any more aware of what is happening as a result of this illumination we may light the candle in order to provide her with the reassurance that in case she needs something, her friends will be able to see the need and take care of it.

The light in this case, explain the commentaries, is not necessary for medical purposes, because the midwife can easily make the delivery without the light of the candle. Its purpose is simply to save the woman from the anxiety which can endanger her life. It is for this reason, points out Tosefos, that there is no need for a doctor to rule that she is in need of such reassurance, as is required in deciding whether a sick person must eat on Yom Kippur. The danger to a woman in childbirth from the fear that she is not being properly treated is greater than the possibility of fasting adversely affecting someone ill.

A practical application of this concept of psychological assistance is the rule that a woman giving birth, or any other person in need of emergency medical attention to save his life, may be accompanied in the ambulance taking them to the hospital by a family member or friend who will provide them with the reassurance they require in order to prevent their situation from deteriorating due to panic.

Shabbos 128b

Near and Far

A mitzvah which Jews accepted upon themselves with joy, such as the mitzvah of *milah*, is still celebrated by them with joy (with a festive meal — Rashi). But a mitzvah which they accepted in a spirit of discord, such as the prohibition of marrying close relatives, is still marked by discord, for there is no marriage contract which is free of some bickering.

Why did Jews react with such resentment to the ban on marrying close relatives?

Human logic dictates that two people who come from the same source are more likely to form a harmonious couple and to produce children who do not have the conflicting traits which can result from a blending of genes. The Torah, however, overruled this approach and insisted that marriage take place only between two parties who are not closely related to each other.

Such a union may indeed spark an initial collision between disparate personalities insisting on different things. The marriage contract which is the first meeting of these two different minds may therefore prove to be the "battleground" for their minor skirmish. The Divine wisdom in prescribing such a union is only fully appreciated after the wedding takes place and the seemingly incompatible partners form a solid bond which will not easily be dissolved.

As to an understanding of the Torah ban on relatives, Rambam in his Guide to the Perplexed offers one approach that there was a need to safeguard the respect due to certain relatives, a respect which would be undermined by intimate relations. This approach and another one put forward by Rambam are rejected by Ramban who hints at a mystical basis. He nevertheless offers a logical explanation as well — that a child born of related parents tends to be physically weaker. His comment that this is a well known medical fact is understood to be a reference to the hemophilia prevalent amongst royal inbreeding families.

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

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