

# MACHON PUAH

## Stem Cell and Circumcision

Last time we discussed the question as to whether a child conceived through fertility treatment may be circumcised on Shabbat. This is based on Rabbeinu Chananel's comment that a child conceived in a miraculous way is not circumcised on Shabbat. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach suggested that fertility treatment is analogous to a miraculous conception. As such if the boy was born on Shabbat the circumcision would have to be delayed.

I once asked Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu this question and he replied that a miraculous conception would indeed not override Shabbat, however fertility treatment is not considered miraculous. His logic was that in fertility treatment the doctors basically replicate the exact process of regular fertilization and conception in which sperm meets egg. Whether this happens in the body or in the laboratory is irrelevant and both would be considered natural conception.

I then asked him a question related to embryos created by stem cells that we discussed a few weeks ago. If we can create a sperm or an egg cell by dividing a regular cell with an entire set of chromosomes into half and then use that to fertilize the egg would that be miraculous? Rabbi Eliyahu answered that no, that would not be considered miraculous, since the end result was fertilization due to the meeting of two cells. The fact that the cell was created in an unusual manner was not all that relevant and the only significant point was whether fertilization and concep-

tion had been achieved in a "natural way". Rabbi Eliyahu did agree that cloning would be unnatural and be considered "miraculous" since it did not involve a process of fertilization.

Based on that conversation we can deduce that if we create cells by starting with stem cells and through a biochemical process converted them to sperm cells and then used these "sperm cells" to achieve fertilization this would still be considered as a natural conception. As such, the man would fulfill his halachic obligation to procreate and the children produced would be considered his in the eyes of the halacha.

While stem cell treatment is relatively new and sounds fantastic to many of us, when analyzed in this way it can be seen as perfectly natural and nothing extraordinary. Some countries have outlawed stem cell research as they view it as unnatural but in our view this is to be encouraged and seen as an important treatment that can be extremely beneficial.

More on this next week.

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