

MACHON PUAH Crying Openly

Last time we tried to view the story of Chana and her struggle with fertility from the perspective of a couple going through fertility treatment. Instead of being a comfort it can be even more painful to come to Shul, which should be a safe and neutral environment, and to continue to hear about fertility. In addition Chana's happy end in the birth of Shmuel may be radically different from their own reality.

In discussing this portion of the Tanach with people facing their own fertility challenges we can find a new meaning and subtle ideas in the story which may resonate with them. The first is that Chana struggled with infertility and the Tanach stresses this. "She wept and would not eat" (Shmuel Alef 1:7). She was sad, depressed and suffered so much that her husband implored her to eat and be positive, enjoying the wonderful relationship that they had and placing less importance on having children. (See next verse) Even after his request and her acquiescing and agreeing to eat and drink, she was still sad, she could function but she did not cheer up and her pain was still raw and overpowering. "She was depressed" (ibid. 10).

It is legitimate to cry and be overcome by the emotion of infertility. Chana is presented as a model of the infertile woman whose story can resonate with other such women. She cries and when she is told that she is exaggerating and harming herself she eats and drinks but does not and cannot now be

happy. She is distraught.

The next words in the text guide us as to how she used her pain and anguish, "she was depressed and she prayed to Hashem crying a lot." She turned to the Almighty and still prayed; she did not leave the shul or refuse to attend services. She did cry before, during and after her prayers, but she did pray and never cut off her reliance and belief in Hashem and His infinite and ultimate goodness.

In addition she was able to cry publicly, she did not disappear into an inner room or reality but shared her pain and sorrow with anyone who was sensitive enough to notice. Many people find it so hard to express their emotions in front of others. As a result many surrounding them are sadly unaware of their pain. Chana was able and willing to share her emotional state, while not everyone can be as open and clear as this it can be advantageous to be a little more open about what they are going through at least with people close to them.

More on this next time.

Ed. note: Rather than saving this last piece of a trilogy of articles about Chana for the next issue of Torah Tidbits, we present it here...

Not Drunk, Just Praying

Last time we saw that the story of Chana can give hope to those suffering from fertility challenges. Chana cried openly and continued to pray; she refused to hide her feelings and resisted the temptation to reject Hashem.

There is one more aspect of the story which can resonate with couples experiencing difficulties getting pregnant. After she pours out her heart in true prayer and longing, Eli the Kohen approaches her and assumes that she is drunk. Since the custom until then was to pray without moving one's mouth he quickly drew the conclusion that she was inebriated and that was why she was acting in this unusual manner.

Not only did he draw a false conclusion but he rebuked her quite publicly. "How long will you be drunk? Remove your wine from yourself" (Shmuel Alef 1:14). She replied with the most honest and simple answer that she was depressed but not drunk, praying and pouring out her heart. She did not need to sober up; rather she needed to be allowed to pray.

The halacha is that we need to pray silently while moving our lips, and we deduce this from Chana's genuine prayer. Eli was wrong and Chana was correct. Even great people can be mistaken and say the wrong thing; they can be convinced that they are trying to help and read the situation as they see it but they are wrong.

Anyone undergoing a period of infertility will tell you that they have faced other people's insensitive and sometimes just sill comments. "Calm down and everything will be OK", "My friend had infertility and now she has five children", "Just look at Sarah, she had children when she was 90 years old, you'll be fine". And any other variation on this theme. People are trying to be nice but they are

mistaken, and if Eli was wrong, even though he who was the Cohen and communicated with the Almighty, then regular people can be wrong and say the wrong thing. They are not being mean, they are just being human.

This is also a lesson for the rest of us; as we enter the New Year we can try to be more empathetic and sensitive to other people's needs. We can just be there and listen without passing judgement and giving out "good" advice. We can cry with others and pray with and for them even when we cannot console them, and we can allow them to pray in a safe environment where they can communicate with Hashem and allow Him to solve their problems.

This provides a deeper understanding of the story of Chana which can be beneficial for those facing fertility challenges and those who are fortunate not to.

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