

[TRANSLATION]

Preventing Pregnancy

The seriousness of the issue

1. It is forbidden to take any action to prevent pregnancy, and this is a serious matter¹. Even when doctors advise this, there is usually no medical basis for it and it is merely based on their carefree attitude of these matters. Nevertheless, in cases of great need, there are methods that can be approved in certain circumstances, for example when a woman feels physically or emotionally weak after childbirth. One cannot set out general guidelines in these matters and a competent Moreh Horo'oh must be consulted. When contraception is permitted, one must clarify exactly which methods may be used, as some of them involve repeated serious issurim.

¹ The Poskim throughout the generations have written at length on the seriousness of this matter, and their words have been collected in Sedei Chemed (Asifas Dinim, Ishus 1-32) and Otzar Haposkim (23:5). Recent Poskim have also written on the subject at length, see: Igros Moshe (Even Ho'ezer 3:21 and 24, 4:67, 69, 73 and 74); Chelkas Yaakov (Even Ho'ezer 61); Shiurei Shevet Halevy (194:1); Minchas Yitzchok (5:100); Tzitz Eliezer (6:42 9:51 15:43); Yabia Omer (10 Even Ho'ezer 24); Mishneh Halochos (5:210) and Shiurei Torah Lerof'im (by Rav Y. Silberstein, Vol. 4) and we shall present here very briefly the main issues that they raise.

- a. Chazal warned in very strong terms against the avoidance of the mitzva of having children, stating that one who is not engaged in this mitzva is *chayov misah* in this world and will not live in Olom Haboh and is ostracised in Shomayim and commits a misdeed that cannot be rectified, it is as if one has shed blood and causes the Shechina to depart from Yisroel (see Brochos 10 and Yevomos 63-64). By using methods of contraception one is certainly not considered to be involved in the mitzva of having children and is included in the above. In fact this is worse than someone who is not involved in the mitzva as here one is actively preventing the fulfilment of the mitzva.
- b. Even if one has already fulfilled the mitzva of having children, there remains a mitzva to have more children, as Chazal (Yevomos 62) explain on the possuk 'Sow your seed in the morning and in the evening do not hold back your hand [from sewing] as you do not know which [produce] shall be successful and if both will be equally good'. This ruling is also codified by the Rambam (Hilchos Ishus 15:7), who writes: Even if a person has fulfilled the mitzva of having children, he still has a mitzva Midivrei Sofrim not to avoid the continued fulfilment of this mitzva as long as he has strength, as one who adds one nefesh to Yisroel is as if he has built a world. The Bach (Yoreh Deah 228) rules that this is a Torah obligation.
- c. Chazal teach us (Avoda Zoro 5 and Nidda 13) that Moshiach will not come until all the neshomos destined to come to this world have come, so that by avoiding birth of more children one is delaying the coming of Moshiach.
- d. The use of some forms of contraception involves the infringement of serious Torah prohibitions (see Even Ho'ezer 5:11).
- e. Besides for the reasons set out above, one should be aware that taking contraceptive tablets (that affect the hormones) for an extended period involves serious health risks, as mentioned in Igros Moshe, and already referred to by the Chasam Sofer (6:40) and Toras Chesed (Even Ho'ezer 64). This is also the view of contemporary doctors. Ashrei Yoladeto (Kuntres Sama Dechayusa) brings the testimony of a recognised American doctor that this can cause disease of the breast R'l due to its effect on something in the genetic makeup of many Ashkenazi women, and should therefore be avoided whenever possible. It can also cause dangerous blood clots R'l. The sefer Orchos Habayis (p. 205) writes as follows: Every Bas Yisroel should therefore avoid taking contraceptive pills unless it is absolutely necessary, and by this she will be doing herself and her children a great favour. If she is instructed to by a competent doctor, she should first clarify thoroughly which pills she should take.

One cannot compare one case to another and may not rely on rulings supposedly given to others; it is essential that a Moreh Horo'oh is consulted in each individual case².

Trust in Hashem

2. It is important to mention here that in our times there are those who seek heterim for contraception due to a lack of Bitochon (trust in Hashem), not wishing to carry the burden of bringing up children and associated housekeeping duties, or due to living in a small apartment. The Acharonim have written³ that one should protest strongly against this attitude, and should know that in fact brocho and success increase as the family increases and a larger family brings great blessing in all aspects of life. According to the Torah hashkofo having many children is a great brocho for a person, not chas vesholom the opposite⁴, as stated by the Sefer Chassidim (519) in the following passage: A person should not be concerned that his wife will become pregnant thinking that he will not be able to support the newborn, as for that reason Hakodosh Boruch Hu provides a mother with milk for her child - in order to show that Hakodosh Boruch Hu provides sustenance together with the birth of a child. He who gives life gives sustenance. One should therefore place one's trust in Hashem who provides for all living creatures and He provides everyone who trusts in Him with all their needs, with physical and emotional health and everything good.

The Sheivet HaLevy (11:291) writes as follows: Dovid Hamelech writes in Tehillim (107), 'And He has lifted the poor from poverty and He has established families like a flock' revealing to

² The Sheivet HaLevy (4:167) writes: It is common for female doctors to advise women regarding contraception and on other matters that are contrary to the holiness of our Holy Torah, and they should be taught not to accept their advice and to accept only the rulings given to them by competent Morei Horo'oh who are guided by Tahara and Yiras Hashem. The Chelkas Yaakov writes the following: The doctors greatly exaggerate [the risks of pregnancy] as in their warped opinion contraception is a trivial matter, and for the slightest reason they say that there is a danger [involved in pregnancy], and one must investigate very carefully and clarify if what they say is true. Regarding the infringement of serious Torah prohibitions each time there is marital contact, see above (note 1d).

³ See references in previous note. The Levushei Mordechai, who was the leading posek of his generation in Hungary, writes (Even Ho'ezer 28) as follows: But those who [wish to avoid pregnancy] for no reason except for the fact they think it is good for them not to have children to bring up and due to a lack of bitochon and a worry over their livelihood, cholilo to engage in this practice [of contraception], and it is a man's duty to protest strongly against it. According to the Chasam Sofer it appears that he is obliged to divorce his wife in such a case [where she insists on contraception]. Where he has not yet fulfilled the mitzva of having children it is surely obvious [that it is forbidden], **but even if he has, unless it is due to the pain of childbirth or illness**, the same halocho would seem to apply as there is no one who permits it. His words are also quoted in brief by the Minchas Yitzchok (3:27). Mesores Moshe (containing rulings of Rav Moshe Feinstein) writes as follows: When our Rebbe was asked to permit contraception and he was told that the person's wife suffers badly from a nervous condition etc he would say that all this is the result of a slight lack of emuna or bitochon not trusting that Hashem will give them strength etc and this is something that I have seen is prevalent among women; they are somewhat lacking in emuna and bitochon, especially when it involves these matters.

⁴ There are many proofs from the Torah that having more children is a brocho: 1. Hakodosh Boruch Hu blessed Avrohom Ovinu that his children should be as many as the dust of the earth. 2. When Lovon Horosho blessed his daughter Rifka, he said, 'Our sister – may you multiply to thousands of ten thousands'. 3. When Leah was blessed with a fourth child she was filled with joy and said, 'This time I thank Hashem' and we find she continued to give thanks after she was blessed with more children. 4. Yaakov blessed his sons that they should multiply like fish. 5. The Gemoro (Brochos 63) teaches that our ancestors were blessed with multiple-births of six children at a time. 6. We express this blessing and request in the Zemer of Hamavdil sung after Havdolo: 'May our children and our wealth multiply like the sand'. 7. The Gemoro (Kesubos) says that just as yeast is beneficial for dough, so the [menstrual] blood is beneficial for a woman - as it brings her more children. 8. Chazal tell us (Shabbos 30) that among the brochos that we will merit in the future [after the coming of Moshiach, is that a woman will give birth every day. [These sources, as well as others, are quoted in the sefer Kereisi u'Plesi Hamevo'or].

us that the raising from poverty comes through increasing the size of the family, which will eventually bring both spiritual and physical bounty. Having a larger number of children, in accordance with the dictates of Torah and Halocho does not result in a reduction of one's livelihood.'

'Furthermore, with each child whom one brings into the world, one increases one's partnership with Hakodosh Boruch Hu in the creating of His world, as Chazal teach us, 'There are three partners in each person, Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the father, and the mother'.

Don't be misled that having a smaller family will make you stronger and healthier

3. Some have the idea that having a smaller family will make them stronger and healthier, but the truth is that if we look back at our mothers and grandmothers who did not have all the conveniences and gadgets that we have now, they had no gas and electricity and running water, yet it did not occur to them to refrain from bringing children into the world. They knew that this is a woman's main purpose in life and they were overjoyed at the birth of their tenth child as they were at the first, and after the birth of each child they felt better and felt full of satisfaction at having fulfilled her duty. Whereas today, when facilities related to childbirth are much better than they were in the past, people seek all kinds of methods to avoid pregnancy. But Chazal teach us that 'Everyone who adds one nefesh to Klal Yisroel is as if they created a world'⁵ and Hakodosh Boruch rewards parents greatly for each child born to them, and each child brings a brocho to the home. We should follow in the ways of our fathers and mothers and not be misled by those who have no Yiras Hashem in their hearts and whose entire lifestyle is based merely on enjoying worldly pleasures and comforts. A woman who conducts herself in accordance with the Torah path will be blessed by Hakodosh Boruch hu with children who are righteous and pure and she will be blessed with brocho and hatzlocho and everything good⁶.

Don't be misled into thinking that you are benefitting your children

4. There are some who have the mistaken belief that they are limiting the size of their family for the benefit of their children, thinking that in a large family it is impossible to give each child the personal attention they require. But in fact, it is better for children to grow up in a large family, where the older children gradually help with the care of the younger ones. In a small family, children often grow up spoiled and do not assist in household chores and suffer later due to being unused to taking responsibility and helping their mother – they expect an easy life which they do not achieve and they suffer from constantly strained nerves as a result of this⁷.

The measure of each person's suffering and pleasure in life are decreed Min Hashomayim and one cannot escape from it

5. Furthermore, even if one were to hold the mistaken belief⁸ that by reducing the size of one's family one slightly reduces one's domestic responsibilities, one should be aware that, 'truly, the amount of pain and suffering as well as the amount of pleasure in life is all decreed Min HaShomayim on Rosh Hashono, and one cannot escape from it. If a person avoids some type of responsibility that involves suffering, some other form of suffering will take its place, and the overall level of pain will not be reduced or increased. Hashem has all kinds of means of

⁵ Rambam, Hilchos Ishus 15:16.

⁶ Sefer Orchos HaBayis (by the author of Mo'adim U'Zemanim, p. 206)

⁷ From a letter by the Kehillas Yaakov ztl (the letter is printed in full in Orchos Rabeinu 4:75)

⁸ The Kehillas Yaakov writes (in his letter): Women make a great mistake in thinking that they are making their lives easier by not having many children. In fact there is no difference between being busy looking after three children or seven children, as in both cases she will be busy and occupied all day and will rest at night. That is truly the reality.

bringing this about, all kinds of illnesses R'l, poverty R'l, embarrassment, quarrels and disagreements between husband and wife or with neighbours or partners, pressure from creditors, depression with no apparent cause, losing appeal to others, misery etc, and no method in the world can reduce or increase the level of suffering or the joy of life and pleasure decreed in Heaven for a person. If one minimises life's responsibilities through contraception, Hashem knows which other form of responsibility to replace it with, at that time, or some years later, and a person should not engage in any endeavours that go against the natural order of life that has been ordained by the Creator – may He be blessed!⁹

Points to think about

6. Another point to think about is that children are more precious to their parents than all the world's riches and they will do whatever they possibly can for their children. So how can they so light-heartedly take a decision to engage in methods to avoid the birth of more children¹⁰?
7. Shlomo Hamelech said in his wisdom, 'Sow your seed in the morning and in the evening do not hold back your hand [from sewing] as you do not know which [produce] shall be successful and if both will be equally good¹¹'. This means that even if you gave birth to children in your younger years, continue to give birth as you grow older, as you do not know which of them shall be good and G-d fearing, and will be lasting¹². This is even more relevant in our days of increased nisyonos, and it is surely worthwhile to do whatever one can when one is younger and when one is older to merit a child who is a true Yerei Shomayim¹³. Who can know how much nachas people deprive themselves of by limiting the size of their families – they may be stopping the birth of a child who would light up the world, and certainly one from whom the parents would have derived more nachas than they did from their other children. See some amazing stories on this in the footnote¹⁴.

⁹ The holy words of the Kehilas Yaakov in his letter – quoted above. See also Eretz Tzvi al haTorah (by the holy gaon of Kozhiglov, at the end of Parshas Vayeitzei) where he writes as follows: Just as the extent of a person's livelihood [for the coming year] is decreed on Rosh Hashono, similarly, the measure of his enjoyment [he is to have in the coming year] is decreed on Rosh Hashono, and it is impossible for a person to take for himself even a miniscule measure of enjoyment or honour that was not decreed on Rosh Hashono for him to have. And if he does enjoy something that he should not have benefitted from, he loses something of the enjoyment allowed to him [elsewhere]. A similar statement was made by the holy Rav Shlomo of Zevil (Tzadik Yesod Olom Vol. 2 p. 316).

¹⁰ Chelkas Yaakov (Even Ho'ezer 61). He concludes with the following: I have written at some length with sharp language, because my heart mourns over the breach that has become prevalent amongst some sectors of our nation to follow the accursed practice, in France and places associated with it. This was written in 5615 (1955), and in our days, for our many sins, the spiritual diseases is continually spreading.

¹¹ Koheles (11:6).

¹² Rashi on Yevomos (62: 'Ei zeh yichshar').

¹³ Siforno (Koheles 11:16).

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- a. Rashi writes (Koheles 11:16) that we find that Avtzon had 30 married daughters and 30 married sons and all of them died during his lifetime. In his old age he gave birth to Oveid, who survived.
- b. In Parshas Bereishis it tells us that Lemech had two wives, Odoh and Tziloh. Rashi explains that Odoh gave birth to his children and Tziloh used a contraceptive potion. Yet we find further in the Parsha that Tziloh gave birth to Tuval Kayin and his sister Naamoh. The Baalei Tosfos explain that on that occasion, the contraceptive did not work and she birth to Naamoh, the wife of Noach, from whose children the whole world was reborn (Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein in Shiurei Torah LeRo''im 4:240).
- c. In Maaseh Ish (Vol 1, beginning of Chapter One) the following story is told: The mother of the Chazon Ish was unwell and the doctors told her that it would be dangerous for her to become pregnant and to give birth, but she did not listen to the words of the doctors. Her father, Rav Shoul Katzenelenbogen suggested to his son-in-law that there seemed no option other than divorce, but his daughter felt otherwise. 'I have been created for this purpose, and Hashem will surely have mercy', she said. She

In case of necessity

8. But as stated above, where there is a genuine need to avoid pregnancy, one should ask a competent Moreh Horo'oh if there is a basis to be lenient. But one should be aware that almost all women who use methods of contraception face problems, such as staining and/or irregular cycles, and sometimes they are unable to go to Tevila due to periods or staining at times when they would not expect them. It is therefore preferable to engage in natural methods such as delaying Tevila to the 21st day after the beginning of the period – which is generally after the time of ovulation and she will therefore not become pregnant at that time. See notes¹⁵.

decided [to remain with her husband and to ignore the doctors' words], and indeed Hashem had mercy, not only on her, but on all of Klal Yisroel! She gave birth to nine children and all her sons and sons-in-law were Gedolei Yisroel, the greatest of them being the Chazon Ish. (The Chofetz Chayim expressed his amazement at how she merited such tzadikim, and it may well have been the result of her mesirus nefesh).

- d. It is told that the father of Steipler Gaon lost his wife when he was sixty, and he did not intend to remarry. But the holy Rebbe of Hornosteipel encouraged him to remarry, and he was blessed with a son – none other than the holy gaon the author of Kehilas Yaakov!
- e. The gaon Rav Elozor Menachem Shach said that when his mother was pregnant with him the doctors told her that she must have an abortion. They tried to tell her not to be upset, as after all she already had nine children. She did not listen to the doctors and gave birth to her son, Rav Elozor Menachem Shach – the Godol Hador, and he was almost the only one of her ten children (there was also one daughter) who survived the war (also published in Shiurei Torah Lerof'im).
- f. In Tzadik Katomor Yifrach (p. 267) the following story is told by the author of Ayeles Hashachar (shlita) [ztl]: the mother of the gaon Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz ztl was an unmarried girl of over thirty and married a man of about sixty who already had children [from a previous marriage]. But she was clever [and made the correct decision on this]. He was not a special person and it was not considered a particular honour to be married to him. In the end, she gave birth to two children; Rav Michel Yehuda ztl and a daughter who married the gaon Rav Shmuel Rozovsky ztl! The children that he had from his first marriage were simple people, but in the zechus of her being mevater and marrying an older man, she merited giving birth to such a distinguished son - Rav Michel Yehuda ztl.
- g. The Chelkas Yaakov writes, 'in our great misery, after the great destruction [of WWII] that we witnessed with our eyes, there was only one young survivor from large and great families. In many cases, their parents would have foregone giving birth to these young children if they would have been given the choice [yet they were the soul survivors of the family]! Who dares to take such decisions against the order of the creation!
- h. A frightening story occurred recently in Bnei Brak; an entire family, parents with their six children, were travelling in a car and had a terrible traffic accident in which all of them except for one young child were killed. The Sheivet HaLevy ztl gave a hesped for the family and cried bitterly before the seven aronos that were tragically being buried together. In the course of his hesped he recounted with deep emotion, that during the pregnancy of the surviving child the mother had come to him to ask if she should have an abortion as she had been ill with rubella during pregnancy and it was feared that the child would be born with defects as a result. The Sheivet Halevy had told her that it was forbidden to have an abortion, as there is no heter to abort a child even if it is deformed chas vesholom. The mother followed the Rov's instructions and the baby was born in good health Boruch Hashem – and was the sole survivor of the family. (Sefer 'Haposeik').

¹⁵ Heichal Horo'oh (2:149), and I have seen this in practice too. See also Orchos Habayis (p. 205).

One should know that there is no contraceptive method that is guaranteed to avoid pregnancy, as it is something that goes against nature (Ashrei Yoladeto, Chapter 9, note 13).

One should also know that a mother who is breast-feeding and a Moreh Horo'oh has ruled that she should take contraceptive pills, should not start taking them until six or seven weeks after giving birth, in order that the womb should go back to normal, in order to avoid problems in future pregnancy, as it is only after several weeks after childbirth that the womb starts to return to normal and the contraceptive pill stops this from happening (Ashrei Yoladeto, Chapter 9, note 12).

Various Dinim that apply when taking contraceptive pills

9. Dinim regarding dates of expected periods that apply when taking contraceptive pills:
There are different opinions among the Poskim as to whether a woman who is taking contraceptive pills or other treatment (injections etc) to avoid or delay the onset of her period, must treat the date of the expected onset of a period with the usual halachic restrictions or not. When taking halachic advice regarding the permissibility of using contraception, one should ask for a halachic ruling on this too¹⁶.

Halochos of separation that apply after ceasing to take contraceptive pills.

10. When a woman stops taking contraceptive pills and medication to stop or postpone the onset of her period, she will usually begin a period within two or three days. For at least the 24-hours before the time that doctors say she should expect the onset of her period, she must therefore conduct herself as one does when expecting the onset of a period. So if doctors say that she should expect the period to begin three days after stopping taking the contraceptive pill, she should begin the separation period [as at other times when expecting a period] after two days. For the first two days, she may conduct herself as usual¹⁷.

Precautions after a period caused by cessation of the contraceptive pill.

11. A woman who ceased taking contraceptive pills and had a period soon after, must consider the date of that period with regard to the halochos of Onoh Beinonis [i.e. precautions/separation/bedika 30/31 days later] – see note¹⁸.

Bedika and tevila for a woman using a Nuva-ring as a method of contraception.

12. A woman who uses a Nuva-ring [which she inserts and removes] as a method of contraception, must remove it before the bedika done as a Hefsek Tahara, as well as before carrying out one bedika on the first day of the Shiva Nekiymim and again before one bedika on the seventh day. She must also remove it before Tevila¹⁹.

The issur of abortion

13. Abortion is a form of murder. Even when doctors say that the foetus is deformed or has a medical problem - lo oleinu²⁰, abortion is forbidden, even right at the beginning of a pregnancy²¹. In a case where there is - chas vesholom - a risk to the life of the mother due to her pregnancy, there are cases where abortion is permitted in order to save the life of the mother, and a competent Rov who is expert in these halochos must be consulted²².

¹⁶ See full footnote in the original Sefer.

¹⁷ Shiurei Sheivet HaLevy (189:23:5). See also Yesod Hatahara (11:65).

¹⁸ See full footnote in the original Sefer.

¹⁹ See full footnote in the original Sefer.

²⁰ See Tosfos (Chulin 33), Rambam (Hilchos Rotzeiach 1:9) and commentaries. See also Igros Moshe (Choshen Mishpot 2:69, 70) who expounds at length on the seriousness of this prohibition and strongly criticises the attitude of contemporary doctors. See also Tzitz Eliezer (9:51 and 14:100-102).

Additionally, contemporary rabbonim have testified of many cases in which doctors told women to have abortions on the basis of their suspicions that the foetus was unhealthy, and the mothers refused – acting on the instructions of rabbonim, and in fact, they gave birth to perfectly healthy children (see testimony of the Sheivet HaLevy quoted here in an earlier footnote. See also, Orchos Habayis page 255, and other seforim).

²¹ See Teshuvos Chavos Yoir (31), She'ilas Yaavetz (1:43), Beis Shlomo (Choshen Mishpot 132), Achiezer (3:65), Mogein Avrohom (330:15) and Biur Halocho (330:7 paragraph beginning 'Oh sofeik'). See also Divrei Yechezkel Hachodosh (Note 52) by the Rebbe of Shiniava.

²² See Shulchon Oruch (Choshen Mishpot 425:2), Sheivet HaLevy (9:266), Nishmas Avrohom (Choshen Mishpot 425). See also Shiurei Torah Lerof'im (Part Four) for further details on this.