

Mother's day is a hard day for me.

My childhood home was a house where every day was Mother's day (and our mother would remind us of that!). I lost my mother when I was newly engaged, the most exhilarating and stressful time of my life. Losing a parent at any point in one's existence will render them crestfallen, but at this point in my life it had the potential to cripple me. I'm so thankful that my wife got to meet my mother before her passing, and that my mother remained completely aware of her surroundings throughout, telling me how much she loved my wife-to-be. Her petirah was the week of Parshas Chayei Sarah. It was fortuitous, as my father immediately saw to it that the wedding would go off without a hitch. He channelled his inner Avraham Avinu whose next move after burying his beloved Sarah was to ensure that Yitzchak was married off. I somehow put the grief on the back burner and tried to focus on the wedding. It would surface from time to time, and for a large part of my wedding, I was smiling and jubilant on the outside, while hollow, and a complete mess on the inside. I cried from the moment I walked down to the chuppah until I stomped on the glass. We have the pictures to prove it. Although I know that I will never be the same person without her in my life, I feel as if I've adjusted as best I can.

Yet, the fact that my mother is no longer with us is not why Mother's day hurts. The reminder of what my wife and I don't have in our lives right now is what imbues this day with sadness for us.

For almost as long as we've been married, we've been trying to have children. We're at the point in our lives in the community that we're situated in that most of our friends are blessed with bringing children into the world. Like the grief from my mother's passing, this frustration is something that I've attempted to set aside. Yet, the circumstances surrounding this absence are glaring and it's even more painful than no longer having my mother around. The uncomfortability is there when the two of us are at shul where we're met by throngs of young families with beautiful children. It's there when our friends tell us that they soon will have a child of their own to pamper and care for. We are always happy for them. Really, we are. Even so, our exuberance is present only after a few moments of frustration, which we hope to one day not have.

But those issues pale in comparison to the roller coaster that is navigating infertility medically. While there are factors at play in regard to us not being able to conceive, the doctors and medical advice we've sought out have assured us that our numbers are ripe for successful treatments. Nevertheless, it doesn't dam the tears from being unleashed every time we receive the ominous phone call that our prior medical regimen or procedure had failed. There have been so many setbacks: some due to us, while others due to doctors, nurses, labs, pharmacies, and insurance companies. It's a process that envelops us in tremendous hope coupled with almost unbearable

anxiety. Will this round of pills, shots, early morning blood work, appointments, and procedures be the one that works?

I can only how much more this experience paralyzes my wife. Thankfully, she and I are stronger than ever. But it's *her* body that receives the brunt of the action in this infertility onslaught. She is the one who is in constant communication with the doctor, her nurse, and the specialized pharmacy. She is the one who goes early in the morning for tests, still in a haze from her slumber, all before a full day of work. She is the one who reminds herself to take each pill, and administer each injection. Even the slightest mix-up in date or time on this adventurous medical schedule can sabotage the entire cycle, along with our spirit.

I can barely handle this process. I have no idea how she does it.

It's well documented in Tanach that some of the most important women in Jewish history struggled longingly to have a child. Sarah. Rivka. Rachel. Chana. The psukim seem to only give us minimal insight to what it was like for them to grapple with this issue every single day. Within the span of a few verses in a chapter, they have their children almost as quickly as we learn about their having been barren. It's my hope that we'll be afforded the privilege to look back on this time as a mere verse of the greater chapters of our lives, one that can be glossed over if they don't look carefully enough.

But for those holed up, navigating the trenches of uncertainty, the torture couldn't be more tangible and nightmarish.

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 59a) comments that of the portals to Heaven that we can connect to, the Gates of Prayer have been locked In the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple. However, the Shaarei Demaos, the Gates of Tears have not been locked, and are still accessible. There are times throughout this journey, for us and the countless others who experience this pain, where that statement seems facetious. The tears are plentiful, and feels as if those gates have been locked up as well.

For those longing to be a mother on this Mother's day, there is hope among the despair. For the want-to-be fathers, it's there as well. I'm no stranger to reaching out to the Almighty, with prayers that were not immediately answered. We all know the story of the individual who repeatedly beseeched God to let them win the lottery. Day in and day out, the scenario repeats itself. They'd support this organization and this tzedakah, and be able to help so many people. Why won't You make it happen, Hashem?! The Ribono Shel Olam then responds to His faithful, yet despondent servant: "Nu? Buy a ticket!"

L'havdil, we've bought so many tickets. It's understandable why Hashem would withhold this extreme financial windfall from a petitioner based on how it could negatively influence them, despite the advantages abound with a brimming bank account. But we're not asking for the means to procure a luxurious, multi-million dollar home with a garage filled with seven figures worth of cars.

We just want children.

It doesn't seem like an egregious or unachievable aspiration, and that's what hurts the most.