

# Fertility prayer

Throughout the year we read about the fertility struggles of our foremothers and forefathers. It is important to remember that Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Hannah are not the only ones to struggle with infertility. We should not forget those among us who are enduring these same challenges today.

We are blessed to live in communities that are flourishing and growing, but especially in the moments when we celebrate children and families, we must remember those who are still struggling to build and create their own families. This prayer is an opportunity to acknowledge this struggle and embrace these women and men, to show them that they are not alone.

This prayer can be included and said on any occasion.

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' א-להינו וא-להי אבותינו, שומע תפלה, שמע תפלתנו, וברך את כל חשוכי היקדים. פקדם לטובה, ויולידו ברחמיך בנים ובנות, זרעא חיא וקומא.

עין נושאים הם לך לשמים, לב שופכים נכהך כמים. חזקם ואמצם, וגמלם חסדים טובים, ושלח להם רפואה שלמה ותן להם שלות הנפש.

וכשם שפקדת את שרה, רבקה, רחל וְחַנָּה, ושמעת לקול הצדיקים והצדקניות בשועם אליך, כן תשמע לקול תחנונתנו. מלא משאלותינו לטובה, וקבל ברחמים וברצון את תפלתנו. וכן יהי רצון, ונאמר אמן.

May it be Your will God, our Lord and the Lord of our forefathers, who answers prayers, hear our prayers and bless all those who struggle to have children. Remember them for good and with Your mercy they shall have sons and daughters, and grant them enduring offspring.

They lift up their eyes to You in heaven, they pour forth their hearts before You as water. Strengthen them and give them courage, grant them abundant kindness, heal them and help them find peace.

As you remembered Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Hannah, and You have heard the voices of the righteous men and women when they beseeched You, so too please listen to our outcry (to help the men and women of our community). Fulfill our wishes for good and accept with Your mercy and desire our prayers. And so may it be Your will, and let us say Amen.

הנוסח העברי של התפילה נערך בידי ר"ר יעל לויין
   
 The Hebrew prayer was edited by Dr. Yael Levine.





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## Infertility Awareness Shabbat

Yesh Tikva's Fourth Annual Infertility Awareness Shabbat is aimed at raising awareness of and sensitivity towards infertility in our Jewish communities. On Shabbat morning, **Rosh Chodesh Nisan, April 6, 2019**, over 100 synagogues will join with Yesh Tikva and partnering fertility organizations to share a message or D'var Torah that helps enhance communal understanding and facilitate empathy for those who struggle to build and grow their families.

This year we are pleased to be partnering with many other great Jewish fertility organizations, Australia Jewish Fertility Network (AJFN), Fruitful AZ, Gefen Fertility, Hasidah, Jewish Fertility Foundation of Atlanta (JFF), Feit 4 KidZ Fertility Fund of JFLA, and Nishmat.

## About Infertility and Yesh Tikva

Infertility is a topic rarely discussed. Most couples struggling to conceive generally know almost nothing about fertility and treatments until being thrust unprepared into the world of reproductive endocrinology. Once one is handed the ticket into this world of endless doctor's visits, self-injections, and failed cycles, the cyclical sadness, disappointment, and shame can drive individuals into secrecy.

Struggling to have a child, be it one's first or any subsequent child, can create a constant feeling of loss and helplessness. As a Jew there is an added stress of infertility. Many of the Jewish holidays and rituals revolve around children. For those struggling to have a child these holidays and rituals can be very difficult. For some these holidays can even be a source of tremendous pain, as a reminder of what they don't have, yet so desperately want.

Taking the first step on this journey can be very frightening, nerve racking and anxiety provoking. By starting down this road one is admitting that there may be something wrong. Deciding to seek medical or other interventions it is a very brave step into a previously unknown world of seemingly endless medical treatments.

According to the National Survey of Family Growth, 1 in 8 couples (about 11% of the reproductive-age population) in America is diagnosed with infertility each year. It is important to keep in mind that even the most aggressive treatment, in vitro fertilization (IVF), only leads to live birth 47.6% in women under 35 and 34.8% in women 35-37 (Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology, 2016). That means that each time a couple spends \$15,000-\$35,000 (most of which is generally not covered by health insurance) on an IVF treatment, it is statistically more likely for them not to have



a child. This reality suggests that couples will be required to undergo multiple treatments prior to having a child, and for some couples these treatments may never result in a live birth. The process of undergoing treatment is exceptionally time consuming, financially tasking and emotionally draining.

For most Jewish couples who want children, building a family is a given. But for many couples diagnosed with infertility, the road to parenthood is paved with tears, anguish, loss, isolation, and depression.

Yesh Tikva, Hebrew for “There is Hope,” was established to end the silence and create a community of support for all Jewish people facing infertility. Yesh Tikva gives a voice to these struggles, breaks down barriers and facilitates the conversation surrounding infertility. Yesh Tikva offers a website - [www.YeshTikva.org](http://www.YeshTikva.org) - and the following support services: Fertility Friends, Infertility and Jewish Law resources, the Mikvah Infertility Awareness Campaign, educational materials, phone based and in person support groups, and lectures on relevant fertility topics. Yesh Tikva is also working to educate the Jewish community about the unique struggles that come along with infertility, including Infertility Awareness Shabbat, InfertiliTEA workshops and through our Fertility prayer. At Yesh Tikva we work to constantly build, grow, and improve our offered resources.

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### Sample talking points:

The following are sample talking points that you might find helpful in your presentation to your congregation.

### Minimal participation:

We at (insert shul name here) are proud to be participating in Yesh Tikva's Fourth Annual Infertility Awareness Shabbat along with over 100 other synagogues in North America, Australia, and Israel in partnership with Australia Jewish Fertility Network, Fruitful AZ, Gefen Fertility, Hasidah, Jewish Fertility Foundation, Feit 4 KidZ Fertility Fund of JFLA, and Nishmat. This shabbat aims to give infertility a "voice" and to spread awareness in the Jewish community. Too often, infertility is a silent struggle, such that we may not even be aware when our friends, family members or neighbors are suffering. The goal of this campaign is to increase sensitivity towards our fellow Jews who dream of becoming parents.

### Sample 1:

In this month of Nisan, we are reminded once again about the integral role children play in Judaism and its observance. The words we hear over and over again, *והגדת לבנך*, and *you shall tell your children*, can pierce like a dagger through the hearts of couples who struggle with infertility. They are a direct reminder of what these individuals want so desperately - a family - but are not able to have at the moment.

But the commandment to recount the story of the exodus and to celebrate our freedom does not require having children. The Sages intended that everyone be an active participant at the seder. The Rambam in Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 7:1 points out "[The mitzvah to recount the exodus applies] even if one does not have a child." The Rambam goes out of his way to mention the childless in order to reassure those who are not parents, or who may still be single, that they are not left out of this holiday.

As we all start to clean our homes for every speck of chametz that our children or grandchildren may have hidden in the couch or behind the bookcases, be careful not to complain in public. Realize that there are some who pray to have such problems. This year let us work extra hard on being sensitive to everyone in our community.



## Sample 2:

Pesach is often seen as the holiday of inclusion. Before Pesach, we give *maot chitim* - charity - to ensure that those less financially well-off can fully participate in and experience the holiday. On Seder night, we emphatically declare, "Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are needy come and celebrate Pesach."

And, in addition to including the needy and the hungry, there is one more demographic that we are sure to include on Pesach: Children. While they are usually *not* the main players of holiday ritual, children become one of the primary focuses on Pesach. The Torah charges us to "tell your children (Exodus 13:8)" of the great miracles of the Exodus. Much of what we do on Seder night is "so that the children will ask."

But for those who have not yet been blessed with children or struggle to grow their families, Pesach can be painful and lonely. Indeed, for some, Pesach can be the holiday of *exclusion*.

This year, our synagogue is participating in Infertility Awareness Shabbat, to ensure that everyone, especially those navigating infertility, are able to participate in and enjoy the true experience of the holiday in the most meaningful and inclusive way. As a community, let us make every effort to include all of our friends and fellow congregants in our holiday celebrations. This year, make sure that no one in our community needs to spend a Seder or Yom Tov meal alone.

## Some other places to look:

1. The Matriarchs
  - a. Sarah: Bereishit - Genesis (15-17)
  - b. Rivkah: Bereishit – Genesis (26:21) and Yebamot 64a
  - c. Rachel: Bereishit – Genesis (29:31)
  - d. Leah: Bereishit – Genesis (30:1-25)
2. The wife of Manoach: Judges (13:24-25)
3. Hannah: Samuel 1 (1-2), Berakoth 31b

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## Infertility Facts:

- **What is infertility?**
  - Infertility is defined as the inability to conceive after one year of trying for women under 35 or after six months for women over 35, or the inability to carry a pregnancy to live birth (recurrent pregnancy loss).
- **What is the emotional impact of infertility?**
  - A study evaluating individuals with an infertility diagnosis found that these patients suffered from depression and anxiety on levels equivalent to those with life threatening illnesses including cancer, heart disease, and hypertension (Cousineau & Domar 2007).
- **How does infertility impact one's mental health?**
  - An infertility diagnosis can create a significantly distressing life crises, especially as a member of a Jewish community where others are building and expanding their families and most rituals revolve around family and children. The inability to conceive and the loss of potential create significant feelings of loss, similar to the loss of pregnancy. Additionally, dealing (usually alone) with multiple medical decisions, lengthy waiting periods, uncertainties, and the loss of control, leads high levels of emotional distress and turmoil for many individuals and couples.
- **How many people suffer from infertility?**
  - 1 in 8 couples in the United States suffer from infertility (2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth, CDC)
- **What causes infertility?**
  - About a third of infertility is attributed to the male partner, a third to the female partner, and third is attributed to factors in both partners or is diagnosed as "unexplained infertility." Though many people think of infertility as a women's problem men are equally affected.
- **How can infertility be treated?**
  - Many different treatment options exist, including drug therapy, surgical procedures, and reproductive technologies such as Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) and In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). Consult with a Reproductive Endocrinologist or Reproductive Immunologist for the best results.
- **What is recurrent pregnancy loss?**
  - Approximately 20% of all pregnancies will end in a miscarriage due to a non-recurrent cause. According to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine

(ASRM) recurrent pregnancy loss is the loss of two or more consecutive pregnancies. A pregnancy loss is defined as a clinically recognized pregnancy ending before 20 weeks gestation.

- **What are the causes of recurrent pregnancy loss?**
  - Some of the causes for recurrent pregnancy loss include chromosomal abnormalities, blood clotting disorders, autoimmune disorders, uterine or cervical abnormalities, untreated infections including chlamydia and gonorrhea, advanced maternal or paternal age, as well as unexplained factors.
- **How can redcurrant pregnancy loss be treated?**
  - Many different treatment options exist, including drug therapy, immunotherapy, surgical procedures, and reproductive technologies including In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) with Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD). Consult with a Reproductive Endocrinologist or Reproductive Immunologist for the best results.
- **What are the chances of success of IVF treatments?**
  - According to the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology (SART), IVF, the treatment with the highest chances of success, has the following live birth rates:

Age of Woman	<35	35-37	38-40	41-42	>42
% of cycles resulting in live births	47.6%	34.8%	21.8%	11.2%	3.3%

- **How much do fertility treatments cost?**
  - The national average for an IUI is \$3000. The national average for a fresh IVF cycle is \$12,400 (ASRM), plus another \$3,000-5,000 on medication (RESOLVE). Additional technologies, such as Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD), which increase the chance of success of an IVF cycle, cost between \$3,000-6,000.
- **How much of those costs does insurance cover?**
  - Most reproductive technologies are not covered by insurance and must be paid “out-of-pocket.” Only fifteen states have either an insurance mandate to offer fertility coverage to employers or an insurance mandate to cover some level of infertility treatment. Even with insurance, many companies only cover some elements of a given reproductive treatment. Only eight of those fifteen states have an insurance mandate that requires qualified employers to include IVF coverage in their plans offered to their employees: Arkansas, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. (RESOLVE)

- **What is egg freezing?**
  - Egg freezing is the process of stimulating egg production (as done in the first phase of an IVF cycle) for retrieval and storage as a form of fertility preservation for future use in an IVF cycle. According to FertilityIQ it is estimated that this year 10,000 women in the US will freeze their eggs.
  
- **Is egg freezing a guarantee for achieving future pregnancy?**
  - According to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) egg freezing is not a guarantee for achieving future pregnancy. The chance that one frozen egg will yield a baby in the future is around 2-12%. Therefore, when considering egg freezing it is important to consult with a doctor to ensure that enough eggs are retrieved and frozen for future use.
  
- **What is the difference in achieving pregnancy with frozen eggs vs. embryos?**
  - According to the ASRM, based on a comparison of IVF cycles using frozen eggs with IVF cycles using frozen embryos, the chances of achieving live birth ranged from 4-14% per egg frozen and 35-61% per embryo frozen.
  
- **How much does an egg freezing cycle cost?**
  - The cost of an average egg freezing cycle with medication is approximately \$16,000. The average clinic cost is \$11,000 plus on average \$5,000 for medication. Additionally, there are annual storage fees to keep eggs frozen and this on average costs \$3000 a year, varying by clinic and state. (There are some third-party storage facilities and some are less expensive- though there are costs to transport the oocytes from the clinic to the facility and then again back to the clinic when ready for use.) Like other fertility treatments most insurance companies do not yet cover the costs.

### Sensitivity Suggestions:

*It is very important to note that no two people suffer or react identically to similar situations. The following are only suggestions; be sure to consider each individual and his/her experience and apply what you deem to be most appropriate.*

### Keep in mind:

1. Do not assume anything; not everyone who does not have a child or has a large gap between children is navigating infertility.
2. If someone reaches out to share his/her story, the best thing one can do is listen.
3. Be cautious of offering any medical suggestions or referrals unless asked. If asked always offer more than one option. Make sure that congregants are aware of non-medical support options.

### Jewish Ritual Sensitivity:

1. When offering, an individual or couple, the opportunity to participate in a ritual that is thought to help one have children it is important to know who you are asking before doing so:
  - a. Some people appreciate such offers and run at the opportunity
  - b. Some people feel very hurt by such an offer and would prefer not to even be offered them
2. It is a beautiful custom to use child centered holidays as an opportunity to pray for those who have not yet been blessed with children or who are struggling to expand their families.
3. Assess the community experience:
  - a. Where are there spaces that might be particularly painful for a couple?
  - b. What might be a way to be more inclusive at your shabbat tables or holiday meals?
  - c. What might be ways to raise more sensitivity or awareness in the ritual congregational experience?

### When hosting a meal or get-together, ensure that everyone is made to feel *emotionally* included:

1. Be aware of the crowd.
2. If there are individuals who are not married or do not have children, make sure that the conversation does not revolve around marriage and kids.
3. Try to engage in conversations in which everyone can be an active participant.

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**It is important to engage friends or family members whom you suspect may be navigating infertility:**

1. A text message every so often just to say hello can go a long way in making someone feel that you care.
2. Invite family members and/or friends to birthday parties, get-togethers and Shabbat or Yom Tov meals- if they are not up to joining, let them make the decision for themselves and do not make them feel guilty for opting out.

**When engaging family members or friends:**

1. The best thing that one can do for a friend or family member is be a friend, listen when they speak, and offer a shoulder to cry on if need be.
2. Unless requested, avoid sharing advice or tips on how to increase chances of conception.
3. If a friend or family member does share his/her story with you, try not to bring it up every time you see him/her.
4. Assuring people that everything will be okay is generally not comforting, as only God knows the outcome. Rather, assure your friend or family member that no matter what the outcome, you will be there for them in any way that he/she needs. Validate whatever feelings or reactions s/he might have, regardless of what you think about how they are handling the situation. Provide them the space to experience those feelings without feeling judged.

**For parents and grandparents of those navigating infertility:**

1. Be sensitive to your child/grandchild's challenge.
2. Asking them when they will give you a grandchild is hurtful and a reminder of their struggle.
3. Do not push your children to share information about their fertility challenges and treatments that they are not comfortable sharing.
4. For those navigating primary infertility – ensure that your children feel special in their own right and no less important to you even though they have not yet given you a grandchild.
5. For some parents/grandparents getting support may enable them to be more present emotionally for their child/grandchild.

*At times those struggling with infertility, be it primary, secondary or circumstantial, can become emotionally overwhelmed and may need some distance. It may come across as a personal offense, but it is important to remember that it is not personal.*

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### About our community partners:

The Australian Jewish Fertility Network (AJFN) raises awareness about the struggles related to infertility and provides resources, information and offers both financial and emotional support to couples struggling with infertility. We also strongly believe in supporting Jewish continuity and ensuring that every couple has the chance to help build the next generation. [www.ajfn.org.au](http://www.ajfn.org.au)

Fruitful provides community, education and emotional support to those navigating the challenges of infertility. To fulfill our mission, Fruitful takes a holistic approach to fertility by offering social, emotional and educational support to individuals and couples. [www.fruitfulaz.org](http://www.fruitfulaz.org)

Gefen is a non-profit organization that provides emotional and wellness support to fertility challenged women in Israel at minimal or no cost. The Gefen Center, located in the German Colony Jerusalem offers an array of innovative programs of Mind/Body Therapies, CBT, Yoga Fertility Workshops and Complementary Treatments to reduce stress, relax bodies and regain spirit. [www.kerengefen.org](http://www.kerengefen.org) [info@kerengefen.org](mailto:info@kerengefen.org)

Hasidah is the voice of hope and compassion that raises awareness of infertility, connects people to support, and reduces financial barriers to treatment in the Jewish community. For more information, please visit our website at [www.hasidah.org](http://www.hasidah.org).

Jewish Fertility Foundation (JFF) provides financial assistance, educational awareness, and emotional support to Atlanta Jewish families who have medical fertility challenges. JFF fertility grant applications and support are open to any individual/couple experiencing infertility who uses Atlanta based fertility clinics. [www.jewishfertilityfoundation.org](http://www.jewishfertilityfoundation.org)

Jewish Free Loan's Feit 4 Kidz loan program provides interest-free loans up to \$15,000 to residents in LA or Ventura counties to assist with the high cost of IVF fertility treatments or egg freezing. Two guarantors with good credit and steady income are required. The application process begins on the website [www.jfla.org](http://www.jfla.org).

Nishmat's Yoatzot Halacha are Women Advisors in Jewish Law as it relates to intimate married life and women's wellness. A voice of halachic authenticity informed by empathy and moderation, Yoatzot focus on women's spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. Widely admired for their Torah scholarship and fidelity to Jewish law, Yoatzot Halacha respond to questions discreetly, with thoughtful solutions and recommendations. [www.yoatzot.org](http://www.yoatzot.org)