Jewish Bioethics: Abortion and congenital diseases (3 of 4)

Previously (see **here**) we explained that the modern rabbis have very different opinions on the issue of abortion, when facing a congenital disease. We presented three main schools and we also warned the readers that this information should be used just as educational material. If *chas veshsalom* a couple faces such a situation, they have to consult with a doctor and a rabbi.

This consultation should consist of two steps:

First, seeing a specialist physician to examine the results. If he advices interrupting the pregnancy, it is highly recommended to have a second opinion. It might happen than a doctor, because of his philosophical leniency toward abortion, would not see necessary to do more than the standard studies. It is recommended then, unless this is a doctor you know and trust, to have an independent second opinion on such delicate matter.

Second, if the medical opinion is in favor of interrupting the pregnancy, the couple should consult with a rabbi. There are many rabbis that are experts in this type of issues who can assess the Halakhic aspects *and* also the medical and psychological aspects of the situation, each of which will become a factor in his final Halakhic ruling.

Illustration: When the expert rabbi makes the decision of what rabbinical opinion to follow, even if the rabbi would be inclined to follow the stricter opinion which compares abortion to murder, he might consider other extenuating circumstances. For example, the impact on the mental health of the mother, etc. This consideration will affect the rabbi's final ruling.

Also, and primarily, the expert rabbi knows if the detected disease is a mortal disease, like Tay- Sachs or a different congenital disorder, like Down Syndrome, etc. and he will rule accordingly.

Most times, an expert rabbi will meet with the couple's doctor to see all the angles before he arrives to his Halakhic ruling.

(*Adapted from Penine Halakha liqutim, B, 264-265*).

Next week, BH, we will deal with the subject of genetic testing.

Shabbat Shalom!