

MAZEL TOV! IT'S A BABY...



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In an ideal world, back in those uncomplicated days we imagined, the only question was whether the mazel tov was for a girl or boy. The only difficulty was managing nursing and finding time to sleep. The big adjustment just meant juggling attention and resources and getting used to your body post-partum. All of the 'difficulties,' though, paled in comparison to the gift at hand.

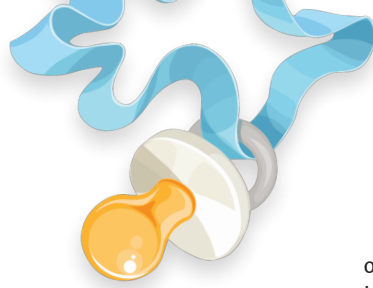
When the picture is less than ideal, it's a whole new reality. Decisions need to be made on so many levels... medical interventions and all sorts of therapies...helping siblings understand what "different" means...learning new terminologies, letting go of old expectations, and dealing with your new status of being mother to a "special child." It's a whirlwind of confusion; you're thrown into foreign territory without so much as an instruction manual, expected to learn a new language and navigate an unfamiliar system with no preparation or expertise.

And on top of trying to get it all right, you're flooded by a huge range of emotions. With everything else on your plate, you may not make the time to feel them all, but no worries...they'll wait for you (or leak when you least expect them to). Know that feeling your feelings isn't a luxury. It's part of your process of living and dealing with a new reality and allowing yourself to be real about it. It's as important as taking care of your physical health and well-being (and can adversely affect your health if ignored). It will be key to creating the meaning you give your experience and give the rest of your family permission to be genuine and feel understood, as well. Of course, no two people are exactly alike and reactions vary. But maybe just knowing what some of the possible harder feelings might be will make them less

threatening if they show up.

Overwhelmed- how will I manage my child's needs, medical issues, treatments, etc.

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Afraid -how will this impact the family, our future?

Angry – why me? How hard would it have been to give me what everyone else seems to have?

Guilty – maybe I was undeserving, punished somehow? And maybe I'm guilty for not accepting and appreciating my baby enough now?

Sad/Depressed – mourning the loss of what I thought would be, feeling hopeless and powerless about the future.

Anxious – harping on “would have, should have’s” of the past, fears for the stages ahead.

Shame – our family picture isn't what others deem perfect; we're *different* and that doesn't feel good.

There will be a range of positive feelings, too. The endearing look and feel of the new baby. The joy of seeing older siblings welcoming a new sibling selflessly and lovingly. The gratitude for a new life and the opportunity to care and share the life of a little someone who needs and adores you.

It won't always be a “hard” feeling day or a better one. Chances are, there'll be a combination of both. You can feel warmly toward your baby and anxious at the same time; proud of how your family is doing and still concerned by others' reactions. Feelings don't fit into any

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one box; they shift and blend, surprising you with their intensity at some times and their ease at others. Just commit to noticing and naming them, allowing yourself to feel them when they come without judging or analyzing them. Don't be afraid of any one feeling overpowering you. It's all part of the experience that you're living and it won't be bigger than you, even if it feels like it might be.

When you feel stuck in all of the fears of the future and not sure you can handle the road ahead, try to bring yourself to the present. You can do that by sitting down with your feet planted on the ground, letting yourself be heavy in your chair, and focusing on slowly breathing in and out (in for the count of four, hold for four, out for four...). Paying attention to your breath puts you into your body and away from your thoughts. What that does is focuses you on where you *are* instead of your mind racing into the future or back into the past. And the *now*

is always safer. You can also ask yourself the question “What's not wrong right now?” and spend two minutes coming up with answers. Anything from “my shoes fit!” to enjoying the color of paint on a wall, to having food in the fridge and peace in Israel...it will remind you that even if all is not yet “right,” there is an awful lot that isn't *wrong*.

There will be many well-meaning people who will give you their words of *chizuk* and *hashkafa* – about the merits of having your child, how special you must be, the tzaddik your baby was in a previous life... and how happy and fortunate you should feel. If those words give you comfort or strength, that's wonderful. If they don't, it doesn't mean you are any less holy. Look through the words of Tehillim. Yes, they are full of emuna and strength. But they are also full of hard questions (Why did You leave me? How long will You forget me?) and difficult feelings. We aren't expected to sugarcoat our emotions and edit out the tougher ones. We are just encouraged to turn them *all* to Hashem, who welcomes the full range of our life's experiences. By the end of our lives, we will be able to say those last words of David Hamelech: "*Kol haneshama tehallei Ka!*" – that *all* that my neshama went through, the high's and low's and everything in between, brought me to connect to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We are meant to fully experience each of our stages and share them with Him, whether they are sad or glad, clear or confounded.

Your children will probably be riding their own emotional roller coasters. They'll need you. They won't need you to fix things or make the hard stuff go away. They'll need you to make them feel that you can hold their feelings with them, that they are not too much for you. When they act out, leaving you to feel powerless and confused, just remember that they are making you



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feel their feelings: they're feeling powerless and confused. The more you show that you share their pain without talking them out of it, the easier that pain will feel. They, too, will have positive and harder feelings. Be equally accepting of both, since they are equally valid.

This journey is an exhausting and exhilarating one. As a card-carrying member of the Spiritual Olympics you find yourself in, you will be someone who people come to admire as strong yet vulnerable, real but incredibly admirable, empathetic and relatable. You will know what a real problem is, but not judge others who still get hung up on the petty stuff. You will know how to value life even if it wasn't the one you chose to live. You will see a child's neshama even more clearly than you see his body, value his essence more than his image. You will emulate Hashem as a giver, teacher, advocate, support, and most loving parent. You will be your best self because you will be bringing out the best self of another. You will be a mother in the truest sense. Because you will have the sense of what the best, biggest, boldest, bravest mothering is all about.

Mazel tov! It's a perfect baby...because it's yours. ♡

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