

## *MEDICAL HALACHIC ASPECTS OF TAY-SACHS DISEASE*

Prof. D. Macir & Rabbi E.Y. Waldenberg

Prof. Macir discusses the medical aspects of Tay-Sachs disease, which results in severe mental and physical retardation, and blindness.

Without exception, death takes place before the age of 4 years. This condition occurs almost exclusively among Ashkenazi Jews. Nowadays, there is a possibility of recognizing the disease by amniocentesis, and if discovered raises the question of therapeutic abortion. With this technique it is not possible to confirm the diagnosis before the end of the first trimester of pregnancy.

The Halachic questions are: (a) Is a couple, the partners of which are known to possess the affected gene, allowed to marry knowing that they should not bear children? (b) If the diagnosis of this sickness is confirmed by amniocentesis, is it permissible to induce abortion after the first trimester?

Rabbi Waldenberg discusses the Halachic considerations of performing abortion. He cites the authority the Posekim who permit abortion when there is "great need"

A disease as severe as Tay-Sachs should be considered a "great need". He also would permit to abortion after the first trimester, up to, but not including, the seventh month of pregnancy.

A couple, the partners of which are found to possess the genes of Tay-Sachs disease, should not be united in marriage.

## *WHAT ARE MEDICAL ETHICS?*

The author emphasizes that medical ethics are no different from "standard" ethics. The more specific nature of the medical aspect is the kind of problems dealt with in medicine.

The author's advice to the physician is, "Do your job best". There are however, problems of patient-physician relationship which differ according to cultures and background.

*(K.D. Clauser, Am. Int. Med; 80:657-660, 1974)*