

■ WITH THE number of double baby carriages being wheeled around, it's difficult to believe that one in every eight couples is fertility challenged. While Israel is known to be medically and financially generous to such couples, the emotional and psychological stress that these couples undergo is generally ignored or overlooked. The recently opened Keren Gefen Mind-Body Fertility Center in Jerusalem's German Colony was established to fill this void. Its broad range of programs, activities and support groups for the various people it serves provide emotional and psychological support for women of all backgrounds and ages undergoing fertility treatment and challenges in their pregnancies.

Established in May 2014, the Gefen organization aims to nurture and support fertility-challenged women and serve as a teaching resource to share its vision and innovative programs with Jewish communities worldwide.

Dr. **Keren Friedman**, founding director, runs the clinic together with **Kady Harari** and a team of expert therapists in the fields of medicine, mental health and alternative medicine. Friedman said: "Once a woman undergoing treatment walks through the Gefen door, she is no longer alone."

Harari, director of the yoga program, guides members into finding the space between each breath. "I know deep in my heart what these women are going through, and my quest is to help them through theirs," she said.

Harari and her staff teach diverse yoga classes, including yoga prenatal and one-on-one sessions with women before or after their medical procedures, such as embryo transfer, once again showing them that they are not alone.

Friedman's husband, Prof. **Yedidia Stern**, explained that she is motivated by the fact that they have a large family, and she wants to express gratitude for this by helping women with fertility problems.

Dr. **Yuval Bdolah**, head of the sperm bank at Hadassah Medical Center on Jerusalem's Mount Scopus, lauded the Gefen clinic for providing the emotional support that complements the physical treatment. Prof. **Arye Hurwitz**, head of the Hadassah Mount Scopus IVF Unit, explained that women helped by the Gefen Center include single women who want to preserve their eggs. This can be a difficult process when decisions need to be made, often alone. Gefen helps these single women to reach a decision. A second group includes women who can no longer conceive naturally. They receive ova which are transferred from younger women. This can be emotionally difficult, and the Gefen Center helps them through the whole process, he said. The Gefen Center also deals with the haredi community, where pressures are different but equally painful and intense, said Hurwitz. In addition, the center runs support groups for haredi husbands whose wives are having fertility treatment, he said.

Dr. **Jordana Hyman**, an IVF physician at Shaarei Zedek Medical Center and medical adviser at the Gefen Center, spoke of the holistic and all-encompassing nature of the support the women receive, emphasizing the kindness and compassion that exemplifies the Gefen Center.

Pulna Klinger and **Batya Prebor**, acupuncturists and trained herbalists, said that acupuncture is a safe and effective method of increasing chances of having a healthy baby by lowering stress and improving blood supply to pelvic organs.

A central feature of the Gefen Center is its connection to leading scholars in Jewish law. Rabbi **Yaakov Warhaftig**, head of the female advisers in Jewish law program at Nishmat, explained that in a joint program the Gefen Center trains women to become experts in family law in all areas relating to infertility, pregnancy challenges and building a family.