

Infertility Speaks: An Imagined Support Group for Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Hannah

By Heather Paul



This is a script for an imagined infertility support group for Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Hannah. You might use it as an alternative or in addition to the Torah reading on Rosh Hashanah day 1 (when we read Sarah's story), or the Haftarah reading on Rosh Hashanah day 2 (when we read Hannah's story). Or you might use it to open up conversation about this very painful topic with your community when you encounter any of these women's stories in the Torah. There are suggested debrief questions to share with your community at the end.

Roles:

- Chaplain
- Sarah
- Rebecca
- Rachel
- Hannah

Chaplain: Welcome, everyone. Thanks for coming tonight. Let's do a group check-in. How are you doing?

Sarah: I can start. I overheard this guy—*Abraham* says he was an angel—telling Abraham that I was actually going to get pregnant. Of course, I didn't believe him. I still don't. I laughed to myself. Snorted, really. I mean, I've always been infertile. Why would that change now? I'm too



old for this shit (*laughs, group laughs a little, too*). But then I started having these symptoms as if I actually am pregnant (*rubs her clearly bulging abdomen*). I don't know what it means.

Chaplain: It sounds like you're not sure you can trust this pregnancy. Or the angel.

Sarah: I can't be pregnant. It's not possible. And even if this is a pregnancy, there's no way I'll carry to term. Really. At my age, it's gonna take way more than some angel's blessing to get me pregnant! (*Softer, rubbing her abdomen*) To keep me pregnant. (*Sad, her guard coming down*) To help me safely grow a child who lives (*sniffles and quickly dries her eyes*). *Dibarti*.

Group: *Shamati*.

Chaplain: Thank you, Sarah. Who else would like to check in?

Rebecca: I can relate to what you said, Sarah, about not trusting it to last. I'm finally pregnant, with twins, and I believe it's real—but please don't congratulate me. I'm not sure mine will last either, and I don't know what will happen if it does. I've been so sick. The twins are warring inside me. God tells me that one will triumph over the other, but I don't know. And it took us so long to get here that I feel like I should just be grateful.

Chaplain: All of your feelings are valid. In my opinion, you do not need to force yourself to be grateful, though I understand that you want to be. It sounds like you're facing a lot of uncertainty.

Rebecca: Yes. Really. A lot. We don't even know if it was male factor infertility, or if it was me, or if it was both of us. All I know is that I didn't get pregnant until *Isaac* and I both prayed at the same time, at the site where his own father almost sacrificed him. Maybe God needed to hear from both of us to know we're serious. Or maybe Isaac and I had to be aligned in what we wanted. But I don't know why it took so long and I don't know what will happen with the twins. I am afraid for them both. And afraid for us. It's like I've been anxious so long I don't know how to be anything else.

Chaplain: That makes a lot of sense to me. Can anyone else relate to Rebecca's anxiety? (*Everyone nods*) You're not alone, Rebecca. We are here to support you, whatever the outcome.

Rebecca: Thanks. I knew you would all understand. Can we pray together at the end?

Chaplain: I'd be happy to pray with you. Is anyone else interested in joining? (*Everyone nods*)

Rebecca: Thanks. I'm scared. I really need it. *Dibarti*.

Group: *Shamati*.

Rachel: I can go next. I'll say I'm sorry in advance. I just need to vent. I'm really pissed off. (*Everyone nods*)



Chaplain: It's OK, Rachel. This is a safe space to be angry.

Rachel: My sister, *Leah*, keeps having kids! She's like a fricken baby machine! I just want one, and she's already had THREE. *Jacob* doesn't love her the way he loves me, but she's the one who keeps giving him children. It's not fair!

Chaplain: I hear you. It really isn't fair. I'm curious though; you mentioned that Jacob doesn't love Leah the way he loves you. Are you worried that he might love her more instead since she's the one who can have children?

Rachel: Ugh, I don't know. Probably. I'm just mad. I finally told Jacob, "Give me children, or I will die!"

Chaplain: How did he respond?

Rachel: He totally didn't get it. He said, "Can I take the place of God?" It's not like I actually expected him to fix anything. I just wanted him to show me that he understands. He clearly doesn't.

Chaplain: Is there a response that would have felt better from Jacob?

Rachel: (*Softer*) I'm sorry. I know how much you long to be a mother. We will get through this together. I love you, and I always will. (*Bursts into tears*) Isaac and Rebecca are so aligned in their vision. Why can't we have that? I know he loves me and I love him, but I want to be a mom, and I'm afraid it will never happen. (*To Rebecca*) I'm sorry. I'm not mad at you. I'm glad you have that, really.

Rebecca: (*Nods*) It's OK, Rachel. I get it.

Chaplain: It sounds like you're angry at Jacob and Leah. (*Rachel nods.*) Where is God in this for you? Are you angry at God, too?

Rachel: Furious. Livid. WHY can't God give me a child?! I don't think I'm actually all that angry at Jacob, though he was such a jerk in his response. It's really God I'm angry at. It's just not fair. (*Continues crying*)

Chaplain: Can anyone here relate to Rachel? (*Everyone nods*) You're not alone. We all understand what it's like to be angry and to know just how unfair it is that some people can have children so easily when it's something we all yearn for so deeply.

Rachel: (*Nodding, crying*) Thanks for listening. *Dibarti.*

Group: *Shamati.*



Hannah: I guess it's my turn. I feel like I'm falling apart. *(Starts crying)* All I do is cry. And pray. And cry more. I can't sleep. I can't eat. It's like the yearning is taking over me, and that's all I have left.

Chaplain: It sounds like you're grieving.

Hannah: It's grief and longing combined. *(Turns to Rachel)* I totally get what you meant, Rachel, about people not understanding. *(Turns back to the group)* I don't feel like anyone outside of this room really understands. I tried to talk about it with Elkanah after Peninah was teasing me again about my infertility. *(Turns to Rachel)* I understand your anger at your sister, too, Rachel. Peninah knows Elkanah loves me best ... so she teases me because I'm the one who can't have children. *(Turns back to the group)* Anyway, Elkanah came up to me and said, "Hannah, why are you crying and why aren't you eating? Why are you so sad? Am I not more devoted to you than 10 sons?" And I get it. He is so devoted to me. I really believe that. But it's not the same. He can't fill the emptiness of my womb. Right now, it feels like nothing can.

Chaplain: It sounds like you felt invalidated by his statement.

Hannah: I did. Even though I know he didn't mean it. After that, I went to the Temple and I prayed there. I was crying so hard that I couldn't breathe or speak. I made God so many promises. I told God I'd give him my child if I could have a child. So much bargaining and begging.

Chaplain: Do you think God heard you?

Hannah: I don't know. It was just all I had left, you know? The prayers came straight from my heart. I had nothing else to give. Eli, the priest, was watching me though, and he accused me of being drunk in the Temple!

Group: *(Gasps)*

Rachel: Hannah, I'm sorry to cut in, I'm just ... what the hell?! I'm angry for you! People just don't fucking get it.

Hannah: *(Nods, crying more)* They really don't. He said, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!"

Chaplain: How did you respond?

Hannah: I said, "Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to God. Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress." And he said, "Then go in peace, and may the God of *Israel* grant you what you have asked."

Chaplain: How did you feel after that?



Hannah: I felt a little better. I was able to eat a bit. I don't know if anything will come from any of this. I'm so beaten down and heartbroken. I guess I just have to keep trying. *(Sigh) Dibarti.*

Group: *Shamati.*

Rachel: I'm glad you felt better. But that schmuck didn't even apologize!

Group: *(Laughs)*

Chaplain: I'm glad you told him what you were doing, Hannah. It's hard to be honest about our pain. *(To group)* That's why I'm so grateful to all of you for gathering here to share. It's hard to talk about it. But we are less alone when we do. I heard so many powerful stories and feelings tonight. Sarah shared her disbelief, Rebecca shared her anxiety, Rachel shared her anger, and Hannah shared her grief and longing. I hope that each of you feels more seen and supported because you opened up here tonight. We will close with a prayer. Even if we don't know what will come of it, it's always worth trying. But first, I'd like to give you the opportunity to bless each other. Would you like to do that?

Group: *(Nods)*

Rachel: Sarah, I heard your cynicism, and I relate to both the disbelief and the pain beneath it. I want to bless you with trust and hope. And if you can't believe this pregnancy is real, may you trust us to believe in it for you.

Group: Amen.

Sarah: Rebecca, your anxiety is absolutely understandable. It's so hard to believe anything will turn out OK when so far, it just hasn't. I want to bless you and the children inside you with peace. May you find space to breathe, to pray, and to quiet your racing thoughts. May you be safe, healthy, and at ease.

Group: Amen.

Rebecca: Hannah, we all relate to the pain you're feeling. And I'm so proud of you for expressing it and grateful to you for sharing it with us here. I want to bless you with self-compassion and love. And may you remember that you can always turn to us when Peninah is bullying you. We are here for you. You are not alone ... and Rachel will probably kick her ass for you if you ask.

Group: *(Laughs)* Amen.

Hannah: Rachel, I don't express it quite like you. *(Group laughs gently)* But like I said, I really understand your anger. It's hard to feel like even your loved ones just don't get it. I want to bless you with patience, calm, and inner peace. May you know how strong and powerful you are, and most of all, how loved you are by your husband and by all of us.



Group: Amen.

Chaplain: Amen. Thank you everyone. I'm going to offer a blessing.

Creator of Light and Darkness,
Please bring the light of life
to the darkness of our wombs
so we may know the wonders
of Your creation

Release us from this Narrow Place
where a Sea of Red will never mean
Redemption

Heal our bodies so they can hold Your light
until it is full and bright, healthy, ready to emerge
from its own Narrow Place

New lives greeting
the light of Your world
a shining redemption at last.

Blessed are You, God of our Ancestors,
Creator of Light and Life, Redeemer of All

Group: Amen!

Debrief Questions

1. Open-ended: What was that like for you?
2. What did you notice about your internal response to each of the women as they were speaking? Did anything surprise you or stand out to you?
3. Did you relate to any of speakers? All of them? If you have dealt with infertility and you are comfortable sharing, tell us which response—Sarah's, Rebecca's, Rachel's, or Hannah's—feels the most like your own? If you've felt like all four of them, feel free to share some examples.
4. If the group includes people with a variety of experiences around childbearing, ask what it was like for them to hear these stories together in a room with people who are experiencing infertility and with people who are not. What was it like to encounter these stories together?

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