

ONE JEW'S LOOK THROUGH JUDAISM AT ABORTION

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INTRODUCTION

True Judaism is in complete contrast to acceptance of abortion. The support for abortion that American Jewry's majority gives is a denial of all in Judaism that we claim to teach and value. Situations in which the Talmud permits abortions are exceedingly rare today. We Jews should be at the forefront of the pro-life battle. We must make the miracle of Hanukkah happen again. That miracle was the victory of love over hate, truth over falsehood, holiness over the profane, righteousness over evil, and the weak over the mighty. We, as a united Jewish people, must renew our dedication to the highest ideals of Hanukkah and to our God.

HOW JUDAISM VIEWS GOD

Examining in depth our beliefs about the definitions, attributes, and actions of God is an indispensable first step for guiding us in our understanding of why we should be a pro-life people.

Understanding God — For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. Is. 55:8

In our finite, mortal vision and understanding, we often cannot fathom what He could possibly value in any given human fetus or embryo.

Consider our song on Yom Kippur, “We are Thy people, Thou art our King.” A king's job is to rule his subjects. Acknowledging the One Who makes the rules for us, we must recognize the unborn as fellow, younger citizens of our King's kingdom.

“We are Thy children, Thou art our Father.” The unborn are our siblings because they have the same Father as we do. The Father of all the human race created us in infinitely perfect love.

“We are Thy possession, Thou art our Portion.” Abortion is destruction of God's possessions — His people. God, our Portion, is our Destiny after we die.

“We are Thy flock, Thou art our Shepherd.” God expects mature people to assist Him in caring for the weak— the sheep among us. Abortion is the opposite of protection of the weak.

“We are Thy vineyard, Thou art our Keeper.” God has plans and a purpose for each “grape”—each child He “grows.”

“We are Thy beloved, Thou art our Friend.” This perfect Friend cannot possibly be neutral about abortion because each abortion is murder of one of His beloved.

Creator — Genesis tells us that God called everything in His creation good. He does not need to seek any person's opinion or approval about anything in His creation. This includes the unborn.

Owner of the Universe — An artist owns his handiwork. Pro-abortion advocates do not acknowledge God's ownership of their bodies, nor the father's rights to take care of and raise the child. The child is first God's child, but each human parent has 100% responsibility toward him.

God Is Holy — Everything in His creation, especially all human life, also is holy, and deserves proper respect.

God Values Human Life — Existing foremost for God's purposes rather than for ours, human life is the highest form of intelligent life on earth. We are able to reflect upon our own existence. We then must conclude that all people's lives are sacred. When the sperm cell fertilizes the egg, a single cell is formed. Therefore, because the embryo or fetus already has complete genetic material from male and female human parents, he is already a human being—not a rat, snake, or monkey.

If the status of sacredness of a given person's life is thought to depend upon the viewpoint and needs of the observer rather than the needs of the life in question, then there is no recognition of a universal law. We accept that we must not allow any unnecessary killing of what is holy. In the Kaddish, our declaration of faithfulness to God, and of humble resignation to His will, and our view of human life, even in times of mourning, are unmistakably clear.

Considering that a baby should be unprotected while in the womb, but worthy of protection one minute later when fully born is contrary to what is known by science. Because it violates separation of church and state, legal abortion is actually unconstitutional. Instead, it is the upholding of the religion of magic. Judaism forbids trust in magic because faith in magic is a total denial of truth. God is Truth in the ultimate sense, and Truth is true, whether a person likes it or not.

Lawgiver — Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her,
And happy is every one that holdeth her fast. Prov. 3:17, 18

If we obey God's Law, we increase our chance for happiness. In countless mothers and fathers, post-abortion syndrome can lead to serious behavioral and social problems which often drag into years. Even siblings of the aborted babies can be negatively affected. A woman discovers that deliberate murder of her defenseless, innocent victim is neither pleasant nor peaceful. Modern, legal abortion also presents a large variety of very serious physical and mental health risks to the mother.

Righteous Judge — We should not hail decisions of mortal judges in a court of lower authority than God's court if their laws oppose God's Law. We do this if we defend Roe v. Wade.

God Is Unchanging — Time or place does not alter God. Because of this, the country or year in which abortions are done is irrelevant to how He thinks of abortion.

God Is Real — Some people might feel that there could not possibly be a God — certainly not a loving, righteous one — because they cannot imagine that such a God would have allowed the Holocaust. God is not answerable to us. Just because a person decides that God does not meet his requirements does not change the fact that God is God. We still depend upon Him for our every breath.

GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS

As Jews . . . we evaluate history . . . by how much refinement there is in the life of a people . . . We gauge culture by the extent to which a whole people, not only individuals, live in accordance with the dictates of an eternal doctrine . . .¹

Increase Our Numbers — And God blessed them; and God said unto them:
'Be fruitful, and multiply . . . ' Gen.1:28

He expresses no concern about any population explosion.

Love God — And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,
and with all thy might. Deut. 6:5

A display of hate instead of love, abortion is the opposite of caring for human life that God values.

Glorify God — O magnify the Lord with me,
And let us exalt His name together. Ps. 34:4

A pro-life stand is exaltation of God. A pro-choice stand is exaltation of some people over others, and is an exaltation of human will over that of God. Abortion is disrespect of God since it is destruction of people, His property.

Bless God — Blessing a king would include protection of his people. Abortion is the opposite of protection; it is an attack upon the very weakest of a king's subjects. This is not the correct way to treat the One Whom we address thus: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe."

Love God's Law — If we say that we love the Torah, we should not make an exception about obeying "Thou shalt not murder" by supporting abortion.

Be Humble — The wearing of a yarmulke, and the making of the sukkah's frame to be frail and shaky both teach us humility. This virtue is the opposite of the sin of pride which is the basis of committing, permitting, or supporting abortion.

Be Holy — Abortion is cold-blooded and selfish. When we think of a holy person, we do not think of one who commits unnecessary murder of defenseless human beings of any age.

Be Innocent — Traditional Judaism considers selfish, unnecessary murder to be a sin. An abortionist and a mother who allows the abortion of her own baby have both sinned.

Hate Evil — If we think that the frailty and tininess of the unborn makes null and void our obligation to act justly toward him, then we are guilty of grave discrimination.

Be a Man — The higher the standard that is valued by one's heart, the more a person is developed as a human being, and the more distant he is from the level of animal. A person who uses not only his brain but also his heart, and exercises that heart to the highest levels of love-related characteristics is attempting to be fully human.

The pro-abortion mentality teaches one to childishly run away from problems, and to avoid facing

responsibility. This is not the traditional Jewish way. A Jewish girl or woman of bat mitzvah age or beyond is considered by our people to be an adult in her obligations toward God. Ending a life is not a mature option for solving poverty, or marital or family problems.

Prevent Slavery — One of the most important lessons that we teach at Passover is that each Jew should consider himself very blessed, like a personally freed slave. Every unborn baby could remind us of this core of our Passover celebration. Abortion is similar to slavery because both deprive every conceived child of every opportunity and blessing in the future for God's glory if only he were allowed to be free — and in the case of abortion — to stay alive.

Besides not owning another person, no one may use another person as he wishes, like a thing instead of a person. Abortion support is a form of slavery support. As slaves in Egypt, we had no rights, voice, vote, or power. Before abortion, babies are not given the opportunity to consent to abortion, nor to sign a donor form. Nonetheless, they already are being used in research.

Prevent Human Sacrifice — We remove ten drops from our wine cups during the seder because the Egyptians suffered from the Ten Plagues. Our happiness about our deliverance from bondage is not allowed to be complete because other people had to suffer and die in the process of our gaining our wish for freedom. The Egyptians are God's children too. A woman who has had an abortion, then, should feel shame and grief. This is because she has allowed the killing of one of God's children in order to gain one of her wishes.

Sacrifice of a life is never the answer to upsetting situations. Abortion, an attempt to protect selfish mentality, is child sacrifice for love of one's life over that of another. Instead of selfishness, true Judaism teaches the giving of love to God, first of all, and then to all mankind before oneself.

Do Good Deeds — Intentional killing of defenseless, innocent people, however disadvantaged, must never be considered an act of mercy or a deed of loving-kindness. Our tradition has always taught us Jews to speak out for and help all disadvantaged humans as much as we can.

Express Gratitude to God — Children, among His gifts to us, must be considered blessings too. Hardly an example of gracious manners, abortion is the epitome of ingratitude to the Giver of these precious gifts.

Atone for Sin — If we fail to repent, but continue to support abortion, do we dare to plea for God's mercy on Yom Kippur? A pregnant woman hires an abortionist, but is she truly innocent of the shed blood of her child? Even if we ourselves have never had or committed an abortion, we Jews as a people are still guilty of, and responsible for the sins of abortion that we allow in our midst, in our community and our world.

Consequences of Disobedience — God does not take lightly man's willful disobedience. In our Scriptures are innumerable examples of His decisions to punish individuals, cities, and entire peoples because they had lived contrary to His orders. Since God and His Law are unchanging, He is still free today to discipline us with suffering.

THOU SHALT NOT MURDER

A pro-choice society says that abortion is a private matter between a woman and her abortionist. God does not consider whether or not any action is known, provable, or even called sinful by other humans. A sin is a sin.

Pro-choice advocates campaign for fewer unwanted pregnancies, and complain that our country has too few abortionists. We must not be satisfied with a mere reduction of abortions. Any abortion by any woman, Jewish or not, is too many abortions.

Occasionally babies are murdered by their mothers only minutes after the babies are born. At what point do we decide to draw the line? The great majority of aborted babies had had no physical or mental “defects.” The idea that any person who is just not good enough in someone else’s opinion may have his life ended is the true core of abortion philosophy. It puts each one of us in danger at some unknown, future point of time when someone might decide that we are not worthy of living any longer. Therefore, legal abortion is a serious threat to all humanity.

RESPECT FOR ANIMALS

Jewish law teaches us to treat animals with respect and compassion. Human babies are killed through abortion for fearful or selfish reasons, but not for the reasons for which we are permitted by Jewish law to kill animals. The conclusion that youth can draw from this is that animals are to be respected more than humans. In our culture, in unprecedented numbers, children and teens attack their schoolteachers, other children, the elderly, and commit rape. Concern for animals’ rights while at the same time saying that we are pro-choice concerning our fellow human beings is contrary to Jewish law.

A GOOD JEWISH MOTHER

Consider how our history would have suffered had any of our heroines chosen to have an abortion. Sarah conceived in old age. She did not give birth to merely one son, but to the whole Jewish people. Any circumstances of parenthood that are less than optimum, such as unappealing aspects of care for either the pregnant mother or the child after birth, have to be viewed as having much less importance than does the standard of preservation of life. Nor is fear or unhappiness about the inconvenience of motherhood sufficient justification for killing one’s child.

No child should be denied any siblings due to abortions by his own mother. Each unborn child is simply our little sister or brother.

Pro-choice mentality pre-decides that a child in an unplanned pregnancy is already no good, too difficult to care for, unable to amount to anything worthwhile, and thus, is unworthy of his parents’ love. A pro-abortion culture teaches a pregnant woman to despair and give up all effort to proceed in her life with a positive attitude. It denies the confidence in God that our heritage teaches us. When we light holiday candles, do we not light two — one for remembering our past, and one for encouraging hope and faith in our future? We have the responsibility to teach about hope and the value of prayer, trusting that God can and will help us through problems in whatever way that He decides is best for us. We must teach that He can and will help the mother through pregnancy and motherhood, and the child in his own life. In the case in which she is not married or otherwise unable to keep the child, we must teach her hope in God that a suitable couple will be found to adopt him. Also it is indispensable to teach her to trust in God’s wisdom concerning why any particular child is conceived, or why he might have some developmental difficulties.

PERSECUTION OF JEWS

All of the individual “Hamans” in our own history looked upon us as scapegoats for their real or imagined problems, and oppressed us because they felt that we were inconvenient or potentially troublesome. **Who among pro-choice advocates today would deny that those are their very same reasons for aborting a child?**

Laws of various totalitarian governments throughout the ages sometimes declared their victims to be subhuman. This type of declaration is no different from the pro-choice American government’s decree that the unborn are not yet human, and deserve even less protection than a dog or cat. The fact that persecution was legal under civil law did not make it moral under God’s Law. The fact that abortion is legal under Roe v. Wade does not make it moral under God’s Law. Victims of those governments had no voice. Neither do the unborn.

HOPE

We looked to America and the State of Israel for protection from the persecution that we suffered everywhere else. We are supporting persecution all over again by being pro-choice and supporting killing our own unborn flesh and blood.

Our people traditionally have thought of children as joys and precious blessings from God. Although very old, Abraham and Sarah were filled with happiness to be Isaac’s parents. Hannah, Samuel’s mother, begged in prayer to God for a child. Today some of us panic at the news of pregnancy, then have abortions. Does abortion or the aggregate of its subsequent ramifications make the sweet year that we pray for each Rosh Ha-Shanah?

Listen, O isles, unto me,
And hearken, ye peoples, from far:
The Lord hath called me from the womb,
From the bowels of my mother hath He made mention of my name . . .
And He said unto me: ‘Thou art My servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified’ . . .
‘I will also give thee for a light of the nations,
That My salvation may be unto the end of the earth.’ Is. 49:1, 3, 6

Light is synonymous with life, hope, righteousness, and holiness. How can the premeditated killing of a defenseless, innocent human being, even if still unborn, be considered consistent with the ideal of light? **If we as a people proclaim that we must work for the opposite of darkness, then we can be only pro-life worldwide.** If we are united in speaking out against abortion, then we indeed can be much stronger in our position as “light of the nations.” Abortion is war of a country’s own inhabitants upon themselves. It is the mighty’s overpowering the weak.

Woe unto them that call evil good,
And good evil . . .
Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes,
And prudent in their own sight! Is. 5:20, 21

Women and girls are not forced by our pro-choice culture to have abortions. Instead, they are encouraged, persuaded, and invited to do so. They are neither imprisoned nor threatened with

violence if they decide to carry a pregnancy to term. They would struggle with all their might if abortion were forced upon them. It is because legal abortion is colored like part of highly developed, dignified civilization, rather than like a practice of barbaric pagans, that women are convinced to see abortion as a perfectly acceptable option.

ONE GOD AND THE END OF DAYS

We believe in one God Who is not a United States Supreme Court judge, and one Law, which is not the United States Supreme Court's rulings. His Law states what He determines is right or wrong. The Shema also affirms that His Law applies to all of the nations and peoples of the world until the end of time.

If we envision a world honoring the one, only true God, it naturally follows that there is only one system of correctness and error, light and darkness, good and evil, and truth and falsehood that is acceptable to us Jews. This oneness is what we should recognize, accept, and defend. By proclaiming the oneness of God, as we do when we state the Shema, we are proclaiming that right is right, and wrong is wrong. Support of casual, unlimited abortion is denial of the Shema, and is a disgrace among us. That sort of abortion is throwing the Shema onto the ground, squashing it underfoot, obliterating it from our prayer book, and sponging it from our memory. Abortion with total license is defiance of all that our heritage teaches us about God.

Since it is true that not all peoples have the same religion or culture, this is precisely why we Jews must speak up against abortion. Regarding something as crucial as decisions concerning human life and death, it is simply too dangerous for the world to have all of these opinions. This is one of the big reasons why we have no peace. Do we believe or do we not that we worship the one, true God? Do we hope or do we not that all peoples soon will know, love, and obey this God Who instructs us in our Torah?

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart . . . but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself . . .
Lev. 19:17, 18

Can we even think of killing our brother or sister? We need to think of an unborn embryo or fetus, Jewish or not, as our younger brother or sister who just has not been born yet.

A rabbi asked his pupils to tell him when night turns into day. All of them gave good answers, but not the one he wanted to hear. Their rabbi then told them that night turns into day when a person can look into the eyes of a stranger, and be able to call him his brother. Is a newborn child not a stranger to us until we have gotten to know him? Each tiny one is a brand-new personality.

CONCLUSION

Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all that were enfeebled in thy rear, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore . . . thou shalt not forget.
Deut. 25: 17–19

Abortion is the intentional taking of defenseless, innocent, unborn human life. The reasons behind almost all abortions are offensive to God, and therefore sinful. They are totally against the high ideals of Torah and Talmud. With few exceptions, abortion is not Jewish, no matter how early, quick, physically painless, or inexpensive, regardless of method or mother's age.

Examining our priorities is critical as we consider the legality of abortion. Queen Esther's courage to speak up for her people, which overpowered her fear for her own life, should inspire us. Our fundamental reason for becoming pro-life should stem from love and respect for God. Avoiding unpleasant consequences as the determinant factor in our choice of behavior does not represent the mature spiritual thinking to which we aspire. What needs to be at the very root of our behavior concerning abortion is the Shema, for the sake of God's glory.

First we need to become steadfast and passionate about this new vision of a world devoid of abortion. This commitment can start and grow through sincere prayer for God's gifts of wisdom, strength, and guidance. The Chosen People should not allow the magnitude of the task before us to thwart our efforts. When God commanded Moses to demand our freedom from Egyptian bondage, Moses listened and followed God's words.

About the Author

The author, of Russian Jewish ancestry, was born in Pennsylvania in 1950, and was raised and educated as a Reform Jew. A wife and mother, she is a graduate of Syracuse University. This is an abbreviated version of an article by the same title which can be found at:

www.geocities.com/prolifejudaism

A complete bibliography can be found on the full-length paper on the website. Contact the author via email at:

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¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Earth Is the Lord's & The Sabbath (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 9.