

ONE JEW'S LOOK THROUGH JUDAISM AT ABORTION

Sherry Davison

INTRODUCTION

He who destroys a single human life is as if he destroyed a whole world.¹

As a child, I learned this quotation. I still believe it now. If at least one person's life is protected, which is the goal of this paper, then my effort will not have been in vain.

I am a Jew. I was born a Jew and raised as a Jew. I love my people and my heritage. However, I am deeply upset because there is a huge discrepancy between everything that I was taught by my Jewish educators and the position of the majority of my people regarding abortion. Everything I learned from my Jewish education is in complete contrast to acceptance of abortion. Judaism is a way of life, not death. Judaism is meant to affirm life and our most noble ideals that we study in our history. It is a system of beliefs and values that we strive to take with us out of synagogue and temple to apply to every aspect of our lives.

Jewish media does not seem to indicate any embarrassment, shame, or horror by our people that some abortionists are Jews, and that some of the American women who have abortions are Jews. I have never heard a rabbi speak against abortion from the pulpit. The support for abortion that American Jewry's majority appears to give is a denial of all in Judaism that we claim to teach and value. I know that some Jews are pro-life. Why are there not more? Why are the rest of us silent? Where is our peoplehood on this important issue? Where is our courageous voice?

Instead of being quietly hidden, we Jews should be at the forefront of the pro-life battle against abortion and its related evils. While praying with all our might for God's help, we should make the miracle of Hanukkah happen again. That miracle — not simply that one day's oil burned for eight days — is the victory of love over hate, truth over falsehood, holiness over the profane, righteousness over evil, and the weak over the mighty. Thus, God conquered His enemies. With our conscience from the deepest, most honest core of our heart, we, as a united Jewish people, must renew our dedication to the highest ideals of Hanukkah and to our God.

And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn the many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. Dan. 12:3

The long parade of treasured, powerful lessons from our heritage, which I have absorbed into my memory, has presented itself to me very clearly and boldly while I have pondered the abortion issue. In this essay I have collected them and have given my interpretation of how each of these lessons refutes pro-choice arguments. My natural conclusion is that our Jewish people should be a united, pro-life voice in the world's battle against abortion and all of its related evils.

Our centuries-old Talmud, our huge, scholarly body of recorded court decisions and vast amounts of detailed commentaries about them, includes instruction concerning decisions about abortion. Its discussion even specifies the time limit in the birth process beyond which any abortion is prohibited. If the major portion of the baby's body has already emerged from the mother, no abortion is allowed. The mother's life then cannot be favored over that of the baby's, for the baby then is a life of equal importance in the eyes of God. This rule automatically outlaws partial-birth abortion. Our Talmud also prohibits abortion in general, even if it were to be done prior to that point of time in birth, unless it will save a mother's life, or will prevent some other near-tragedy from her pregnancy or labor that

truly threatens her. In these types of isolated, life-threatening situations, our Talmudic rabbis not only allow abortion; indeed, they insist upon it. Pregnancies and examples of labor that fall into this classification are exceedingly rare today.

Open thy mouth for the dumb,
In the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Prov. 31:8

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

... And how small a whisper is heard of Him!
But the thunder of His mighty deeds who can understand? Job 26:14

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

Consider our song on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement:

We are Thy people, Thou art our King.
We are Thy children, Thou art our Father.
We are Thy possession, Thou art our Portion.
We are Thy flock, Thou art our Shepherd.
We are Thy vineyard, Thou art our Keeper.
We are Thy beloved, Thou art our Friend.²

“We are Thy people, Thou art our King.” A king’s job is to rule his subjects. He determines policy, and he decides how the rules will be carried out. A king does not say, “Make up your own rules. I don’t care what you do.” God gives us free will, but having free will does not mean that all choices of behavior are acceptable in His eyes. For our own good, we need to follow His will, which is His Law, His Torah. Otherwise, our fate could be jeopardized by damaging our relationship with Him. If we follow another king’s rules instead, we are disobeying the Commandment “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” That other king might be oneself, who, like Adam or Eve, follows his own wish or rule. Acknowledging the One Who makes the rules for us, we must recognize the unborn as fellow, younger citizens of our King’s kingdom. Would we murder a child of any human king of any country on earth? May we do this to a child of the King of kings? What does it mean, and what does it require to properly honor the Kingship of our God?

“We bow the head in reverence, and worship the King of kings, the Holy One, praised be He.”

“We are Thy children, Thou art our Father.” Since the unborn are simply our young brothers and sisters, they are to be treated and cared for like our siblings. Would you want or dare to kill your real sibling who just happens to be already out of your mother’s womb? If you are pro-choice, you

are agreeing with the idea that you may slaughter your sibling, even one who is younger than you —just not born yet. He is your sibling because he has the same Father as you do. Each of our human fathers is our closest male family member. Ideally, he fathered each of us willingly in love. Even if this were not the case in a given situation, God, the Father of all the human race, created us in infinitely perfect love. He wants us to think of Him as intimately close to us, even closer than any human father could be.

Have we not all one father?
Hath not one God created us? Mal. 2:10

“We are Thy possession, Thou art our Portion.” People younger than us must not be excluded from our recognition that we all are the possessions of this King and Father. Just as vandalizing, littering, polluting, and stealing are sins against the owners of property, abortion is destruction of God’s possessions — His people. We look forward to being with this Portion, Who is our Destiny, forever after we die.

. . . And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Ps. 23:6

“We are Thy flock, Thou art our Shepherd.” All people need the help, comfort, and protection of other people. A shepherd tries his best to care for and protect his sheep, but a pack of wolves still might come along, attacking the sheep. A pro-choice society is like the pack of wolves. God expects the mature people in the world to assist in caring for the weak, young, elderly, and disadvantaged — the sheep among us. We, the sheep, must follow the Shepherd. Deliberate disobedience is a denial of the Shepherd’s wisdom.

And we are the people of His pasture, and the flock of His hand. Ps. 95:7

Know ye that the Lord He is God;
It is He that hath made us, and we are His,
His people, and the flock of His pasture. Ps. 100:3

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Ps. 23:1

He guideth me in straight paths for His name’s sake. Ps. 23:3

“Paths” means His Commandments. Obeying these is the way we honor Him. Support of abortion is disobedience to His path, the Law of our Shepherd, and thus against “His name’s sake.”

“We are Thy vineyard, Thou art our Keeper.” A keeper tends his vines in hopes that the grapes growing on them will be of very high quality. He has a purpose in mind for each grape. God, the Keeper, does not want to see any of His people, the grapes, destroyed by any human being. Like the vinekeeper and his grapes, God has plans for each child He “grows,” even though we, in our finite, mortal vision and understanding, often cannot fathom what He could possibly value in any given human fetus or embryo.

“We are Thy beloved, Thou art our Friend.” “We” includes all of God’s people of all countries and races, the old and young, even the unborn. He wants us to believe that He wants to be our best Friend. He treasures us enough to care about what happens to us. Is this not true of what we look

for in our human friends? We say that God is perfect — the perfect Friend. This perfect Friend cannot possibly be neutral about abortion since each abortion is murder of one of His beloved.

Creator

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them . . . And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Gen. 1: 27, 31

Who are we to decide that something or someone God has made is no good? God does not need to seek any person's opinion or approval about anything in His creation.

For Thou hast made my reins;
Thou hast knit me together in my mother's womb.
I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made . . .
My frame was not hidden from Thee,
When I was made in secret,
And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
Thine eyes did see mine unformed substance,
And in Thy book they were all written—
Even the days that were fashioned,
When as yet there was none of them. Ps. 139:13-16

The soul which Thou, O God, hast given unto me came pure from Thee. Thou hast created it, Thou hast formed it, Thou hast breathed it into me; Thou hast preserved it in this body and, at the appointed time, Thou wilt take it from this earth that it may enter upon life everlasting. Praised be Thou, O God, in whose hands are the souls of all the living and the spirits of all flesh . . . Our life would be altogether vanity, were it not for the soul which, fashioned in Thine own image, gives us assurance of our higher destiny and imparts to our fleeting days an abiding value.³

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast kept us in life, and hast preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season.

Who says that we may prevent any given child's chance to be sustained? This prayer proclaims that it is God Who not only keeps us in life, but that He indeed also gave us life.

Owner of the Universe

May we never forget that all we have and prize is but lent to us, a trust for which we must render account to Thee.⁴

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof;
The world, and they that dwell therein. Ps. 24:1

Here, "they" is not differentiated between those who live in huts or mansions, or who are connected to oxygen tents or breathe unaided, or who still live in their mothers' wombs or live outside the wombs. Does an artist not own his handiwork? We do not own ourselves. We need to care for

each other, but we do not own each other. Pro-abortion advocates argue that a woman has rights over her body. They do not acknowledge God's creation or ownership of it, nor the father's rights. The child is first God's child, but each earthly parent has 100% responsibility toward him.

God Is Holy

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory. Is. 6:3

Because God is holy, His creation is holy, and deserves proper respect. We must not be casual about when or how something holy is determined to be in need of destruction. The divinely-inspired Torah is also holy. Pro-choice advocates seem to say that civil law is grander and to be more revered than God's Law. Are we honoring the Torah if we celebrate Roe v. Wade?

God Values Human Life

' . . . Every one that is called by My name,
And whom I have created for My glory,
I have formed him, yea, I have made him.' Is. 43:7

Remember us unto life, O King who delightest in life, and inscribe us in the Book of Life so that we may live worthily for Thy sake, O Lord of life.⁵

"Delightest" here reminds us that human life is treasured by God. Therefore, we are required also to treasure and protect that which delights our God. "For Thy sake" clearly tells us that we must view and treat human life with profound respect. This is because human life exists foremost for God's purposes rather than for ours.

When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which Thou hast established;
What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that Thou thinkest of him?
Yet Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels,
And hast crowned him with glory and honour. Ps. 8:4-6

Unborn humans are not excluded from the status of "little lower than the angels." The human race is the highest form of life on earth. What is it about a human that makes it so? Each of us has a soul — that abstract, inner part of him that enables him to reflect upon his own existence. We then must conclude that all people's lives are sacred — not only those who are fortunate enough to be born. A soul has no properties that can be measured or examined by any scientific method. We can only guess when God establishes a soul in a particular cell or group of cells. Since a human embryo or fetus might already have a soul, we simply should not abort him.

Pro-choice advocates say that the womb contains an embryo or fetus, but not yet a human being. Because the embryo or fetus has complete genetic material from male and female human parents for growing to maturity, he is already a human being. If not, what sort of being is he? Is the embryo or fetus a very young rat, snake, or monkey?

The unborn human is hidden from the unaided eye. He does not breathe through nose or mouth. He does not take nourishment by mouth. All of these characteristics are natural for his age. Consider a day-old baby who is completely hidden from view in a sheet-covered incubator. He is connected to tubes for receiving oxygen, nourishment, and medications. At his age, he is not surviving in natural ways. Why should a human fetus or embryo not be protected by civil law as this baby is?

Pro-abortion advocates seem to think that the sacredness of a given person's life depends upon the viewpoint and needs of the observer. This is a selective definition of sacred — whether we are discussing the unborn, the elderly, the emotionally disturbed, the handicapped, or our next-door neighbor. Selective declaration of sanctity means that there is no recognition of a universal law. Therefore, a country with this type of mentality has very little peace or order. Everyone decides for himself what is right or wrong to satisfy his own individual wants and wishes. If wanting or not wanting a child determines sacredness, how is the decision concerning sacredness reached if the father wants him to live, and the mother wants to abort? How can any person be 50% sacred? Consider woman A and woman B, both pregnant. Woman A wants her baby to be born. Woman B does not want her baby. Is woman A's unborn baby's life sacred, but not woman B's? Three months later, woman A decides that she now does not want the baby to be born. When her idea switches, does the life of the unborn inside her switch from sacred to un-sacred?

Prior to the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision in 1973, unborn human life was considered by U.S. law worthy of protection. After 1973, it no longer is. We accept that we must not allow any unnecessary killing of what is holy. If holiness is from being created by God, then how can one convincingly defend the idea of any switch from holy to unholy, or the other way around? Similarly, if a woman or girl is permitted by U.S. law to have an abortion — which would mean that whatever is growing inside her is not considered by U.S. law to be holy or worthy of protection — then how, in the eyes of U. S. law, can any magical switch from unholy to holy occur once that baby is completely out of the womb? Only after this magical-type switch does U.S. law protect the baby.

Considering a baby unprotected under civil law while in the womb, but worthy of protection one minute later when fully born is contrary to science. Because it violates the ideal of separation of church and state, the legalizing of abortion is unconstitutional. Instead, it is the upholding of the religion of magic. Judaism forbids us to trust in magic. This is because faith in magic is a total denial of truth. For example, one could say that the drops of water that fall from the sky may not be called "rain" until the drops hit the ground. The water drops are rain all along. God is Truth in the ultimate sense, and Truth is true, whether a person likes it or not.

Our thoughts turn to God at the approach of death, and on Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, when we wonder who will live and who will die. Some Jews do not care for the traditional idea of God's Book of Life, in which He writes everyone's fate for the new year. He still is the One we recognize Who is entitled and strong enough to bring life and death. So, we are humbled, and we pray to Him about these big issues on Rosh Hashana and all year.

The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.⁶

The Lord killeth, and maketh alive . . . I Sam. 2:6

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life for us and for all Israel; and say

ye, Amen.

In this line within the Kaddish, our declaration of faithfulness to God and His will, even in times of mourning, our view of human life is unmistakably clear.

Lawgiver

The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever;
The ordinances of the Lord are true, they are righteous altogether;
More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Ps. 19:8-11

Happy is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stood in the way of sinners,
Nor sat in the seat of the scornful.
But his delight is in the law of the Lord . . . Ps. 1:1, 2

If we obey God's Law, we increase our chance for happiness. The depression of post-abortion syndrome is very real. It can prevent the parents' ability to go on with peaceful, healthful success and progress in their lives. Post-abortion syndrome is emotionally paralyzing and crippling to the people who would have been closest to the aborted unborn. Because of its deep emotional damage, it can lead to behavioral, social, and physical problems, which often drag into years. Countless mothers and fathers seek professional counseling for these secondary conditions, but the counselors frequently discover that suffering from an abortion is at the root of the subsequent problems. Even siblings of the aborted babies can be negatively affected.

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 a woman who aborted her child had instead decided to "hold fast" to the Torah's teaching of "Thou shalt not murder," she would not have experienced this post-abortion guilt and sorrow. Suffering with that, she cannot experience the fullness of her own life because she has disobeyed the Torah in such a grave way. A woman discovers that deliberate murder of a defenseless, innocent victim is neither pleasant nor peaceful.

Modern, legal abortion is justified by pro-abortion advocates with the claim that it is safe, but they are wrong. Abortion presents a variety of physical and mental health risks to the mother. There is a strong, proven correlation between abortion and suicide by the mother. Death from the abortion itself, and post-abortion psychosis have been documented. Some of the complications of abortion procedures are "infections requiring intravenous treatment . . . perforation of the uterus . . . problems requiring laparoscopy, laparotomy or transfusion . . . Indirect deaths resulting from latent abortion morbidity include deaths from ectopic pregnancies, complications of labor, breast cancer, ovarian

cancer, suicide, drug abuse, and increased smoking patterns among post-abortion women, to name a few.”⁷

Righteous Judge

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die . . . Eccles. 3:1, 2

The doctrine that God, our ultimate Judge, is perfectly righteous and just is basic to our religion. We believe that God also has complete, flawless wisdom because He knows everything and understands everything in the universe. Since He is perfect, He tempers His justice with profound mercy, and the faithful Jew is one who trusts Him without reservation or doubt. Why would we also hail decisions of mortal judges in a court of lower authority than God’s court if their laws oppose God’s Law? This is what we are doing if we defend Roe v. Wade.

God Is Unchanging

Does God recognize abortion as a woman’s right? Did God feel that abortion was a woman’s right prior to Roe v. Wade? If abortion is legal by civil law in country A, but illegal by civil law in country B, does this mean that God permits abortion in country A, but forbids it in country B? The idea that our God is unchanging, regardless of time or place, is a tenet of our faith.

God Is Real

The fool hath said in his heart: ‘There is no God’ . . . Ps. 14:1

Let us adore the ever-living God . . .

Praised be His name whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever.

The Lord will reign forever, thy God, O Zion, from generation to generation. Hallelujah!

Some pro-choice advocates perhaps feel that they do not have to answer to God since they simply deny the existence of the Supreme Being. Some might feel that there could not possibly be a God — or else, certainly not a loving, righteous one — because they cannot imagine that such a God would have allowed the Holocaust. We need to understand that God is not answerable to us. Just because a person decides that God does not come up to his expectations and requirements does not change the fact that God is God, and that we still depend upon Him for our life and 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 . . .⁸

Increase Our Numbers

And God blessed them; and God said unto them: ‘Be fruitful, and multiply . . . ’
Gen. 1:28

This indeed is the first of God’s commandments found in the Torah. God’s holy touch of His blessing upon this first man and first woman established the capacity of the human race throughout time to help Him to continue His creation. God does not say, “If you do not want the babies whom I give to you, you may kill them.” Instead, He tells us to multiply ourselves, not to diminish our population. 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

This instruction applies to our thoughts, words, and actions. Abortion is disrespect of God since it is destruction of people, His property.

Glorify God

But the Lord of hosts is exalted through justice,
And God the Holy One is sanctified through righteousness. Is. 5:16

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

Consider the word “together” here. We, the Jewish people, must be united in our stand against abortion because a pro-life stand is exaltation of God, Who is love. A pro-choice stand is exaltation of some people over others, and that is not love. Abortion is an exalting of human will over that of God.

Bless God

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe . . .

Here, “blessed” means “respected and good things wished for.” Many of our major prayers begin with the word “blessed” as we refer to God. Honoring 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. Why do we dare to support this kind of sin in the form of abortion against the “King of the universe,” Whom we say we respect and wish good things for, as we proclaim Him blessed?

Love God’s Law

We show honor to our Torah by kissing it with our tallit and by standing when it is removed from or replaced into the ark. On Simhat Torah we rejoice in our possession of God’s Law, and even dance with our beloved Torah. If we say that we love the Torah, why do we make an exception about “Thou shalt not murder” by supporting abortion?

Be Humble

For what are we, what is our life, what our goodness, what our power? ⁹

It hath been told thee, O man, what is good,
And what the Lord doth require of thee:
Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God. Mic. 6:8

And let all the ends of the earth fear Him. Ps. 67:8

Help us, O God, to banish from our hearts . . . self-sufficient leaning upon our own reason.¹⁰

In these modern days, our whole American culture teaches the glories of self-fulfillment, but our Jewish tradition teaches humility. This is a value that God wants us to study, but we seem to influence our people to practice humility and arrogance simultaneously. These two types of lifestyles do not fit together. We wear a yarmulke to remind us to be humble in our relationship to God. When building a sukkah, which is our temporary, booth-like dwelling for our remembrance of God's guidance and bountiful gifts during our forty years' wanderings under Moses, we make it frail and shaky — and always with the sky visible through the leafy covering on its top — to remind us that we are not as powerful as God. Then we turn around and decide to “play God” by committing, permitting, or supporting abortion.

Be Holy

Ye shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy. Lev. 19:2

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

Consider the instructions “vow to do the right” and “peace and truth pursue” in the confirmation song “Hark, the Voice of Children.”¹¹ How can the support of murder for selfishness be peaceful or right?

Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord?
And who shall stand in His holy place?
He that hath clean hands . . . Ps. 24:3, 4

We understand that having “clean hands” is being free from serious sin that is not yet atoned for. Do we consider selfish, unnecessary murder to be a sin? How can an abortionist or a woman who allows the abortion of her own baby have “clean hands”?

Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle?
Who shall dwell upon Thy holy mountain?
He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness,
And speaketh truth in his heart;
That hath no slander upon his tongue,
Nor doeth evil to his fellow . . . Ps. 15:1-3

We understand that to have a positive relationship with God, one must live in a righteous manner. He is not to do “evil to his fellow.” Abortion is a clear example of a forbidden evil upon one’s fellow.

Hate Evil

Hate the evil, and love the good,
And establish justice in the gate . . .
I hate, I despise your feasts,
And I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies . . .
Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs . . .
But let justice well up as waters,
And righteousness as a mighty stream. Amos 5:15, 21, 23, 24

O ye that love the Lord, hate evil. Ps. 97:10

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. Hillel

When others purposely harm us, we react with the natural response of, “What did I do to him to deserve this?” Consider yourself an unborn child in your mother’s womb. Imagine being able to know that you are about to be aborted. Would you be indifferent, joyful, sad, terrified, or angry? True, an unborn child cannot yet form these ideas at all, but does that fact cancel out our obligation to do justice toward him? If we think that that makes null and void our obligation to act justly toward him, frail and tiny as he is, then we are guilty of grave discrimination.

Be a Man

In a place where there are no men, strive, thou, to be a man. Hillel

God gave the human a brain that is more developed than that of any other animal. Through good education and moral training, the core of his emotions, which we call his heart or soul, should develop to very high levels. Some of these feelings are compassion, courage, kindness, gentleness, generosity, and love. Rampant killers are considered to have no heart. The higher the standard that is valued by one’s heart, the more one is developed as a human being, and the more distant he is from the status 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. We must choose to act like full men and full women in a world that has allowed itself to sink to base, shameful depths.

The pro-abortion mentality teaches one to run away from problems and to avoid facing responsibility. Legal abortion encourages an easy, childish way out of difficulties in general, which is not the Jewish way. Once a Jewish girl reaches the bat mitzvah age of twelve, whether or not she has celebrated this milestone in a formal, religious ceremony, she is considered by our people to be an adult in her obligations toward God. Regardless of the age of a pregnant girl or woman, if she feels that she cannot adequately carry out motherhood’s responsibilities, she is morally obligated to secure the best possible future care for her child. 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 the Passover ceremonial meal, the seder, is that each person who studies the drama of our deliverance from Egyptian bondage should consider himself very blessed, like a personally freed slave. In unison around our seder table, we pray and sing in thanksgiving “for what the Lord did for me when He brought me forth out of Egypt.” 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 allowed to be free — and in the case of abortion — to stay alive.

Slavery is against God’s will. No human being is allowed to own another, nor may one person use another as he wishes, like a thing instead of a person. It was not uncommon in ancient Egypt for a master to kill a slave who offended him in some way. How can a Jew differentiate between a slave-and-master relationship and a relationship between an unborn child and abortionist (doctor), or accomplice (pregnant mother), or advocate (the unborn’s grandparents, father, Planned Parenthood, other counseling professional, or any pro-choice voter or congressman)? Abortion support is a form of slavery support.

It is standard, legal practice to have signed forms stating our wishes about being a donor of our bodies or body parts for medical research. Aborted babies do not have this right; they already are being used in research.

Prevent Human Sacrifice

“The story of the Binding of Isaac opens the age-long warfare of Israel against the abominations of child sacrifice, which was rife among the Semitic peoples, as well as their Egyptian and Aryan neighbors. In that age, it was astounding that Abraham’s God should have interposed *to prevent* the sacrifice, not that He should have asked for it. A primary purpose of this command, therefore, was to demonstrate to Abraham and his descendants after him that God abhorred human sacrifice with an infinite abhorrence. Unlike the cruel heathen deities, *it was the spiritual surrender alone that God required*. Moses warns his people not to serve God in the manner of the surrounding nations. ‘For every abomination to the Lord, which He hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters do they burn in the fire to their gods’ (Deuteronomy XII, 31). All the Prophets alike shudder at this hideous aberration of man’s sense of worship, and they do not rest till all Israel shares their horror of this savage custom. It is due to the influence of their teaching that the name *Ge-Hinnom*, the valley where the wicked kings practiced this horrible rite, became a synonym for ‘Hell’.”¹²

We have learned to take ten drops from our wine cups during the seder since 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 gaining our wish for freedom. The Egyptians are God’s children too. A woman who has had an abortion, then, should not feel happiness about the abortion, but shame and grief instead. This is because she has allowed the killing of one of God’s children in order to gain one of her wishes.

If God forbids human sacrifice in mankind’s attempt to please Him, why should we think that He would permit human sacrifice in mankind’s attempt to please ourselves? King Solomon’s wisdom

concerning the two harlots, both claiming motherhood of the same newborn, teaches that 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. True Judaism does not teach selfishness, but teaches instead the giving of love to God, first of all, and then to all mankind before oneself.

Do Good Deeds

Yet if I am for myself only, what am I? Hillel

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

Our daily prayers and those of all of our holidays, whether joyful or solemn, are replete with the tradition of thankfulness. We thank God for His love, faithfulness, Torah, protection, deliverance, bounty, and guidance. On Yom Kippur we even thank Him for offering us the opportunity to atone for sins. We certainly have been trained also to thank Him for the joys and blessings of our individual lives. Children, among His gifts to us, must be considered blessings too. Abortion is the epitome of ingratitude to the Giver of these precious gifts.

Atone for Sins

They did not destroy the peoples,
As the Lord commanded them;
But mingled themselves with the nations,
And learned their works;
And they served their idols,
Which became a snare unto them;
Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto demons,
And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters,
Whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan;
And the land was polluted with blood.
Thus were they defiled with their works,
And went astray in their doings.
Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against His people,
And He abhorred His inheritance. Ps. 106:34-40

. . . Yea, when ye make many prayers,
I will not hear;
Your hands are full of blood. Is. 1:15

On the eve of Yom Kippur, we stand before the visible Torah within the opened ark. We see it there, as though we are facing God Himself, while contemplating the sorrowful, earnest, chanted prayer called "Kol Nidre." How can we dare to plea for God's mercy if we support abortion? A pregnant woman hires an abortionist, but is she truly innocent of the shed blood of her child?

Consequences of Disobedience

... For the Lord is a God of knowledge,
And by Him actions are weighed . . .
But the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness . . .
They that strive with the Lord shall be broken to pieces . . .
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth . . . I Sam. 2:3, 9, 10

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. If I steal, but if no one witnesses my theft, am I innocent in God's eyes? I could declare that it is my own, private business if I decide to steal or not to steal, but God does not consider whether or not any action is known, provable, or even called sinful by other humans. A sin is a sin.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed; to love the Lord thy God, to hearken to His voice, and to cleave unto Him . . .

Deut. 30:19, 20

And He said: 'What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground.' Gen. 4:10

God's reaction to Cain's murdering of Abel is anger and horror. Consider the term "blood" as used here. "The Hebrew word is in the plural. In slaying Abel, Cain slew also generations of Abel's unborn descendants."¹³

Pro-choice advocates want a reduction of the number of unwanted pregnancies, and complain that our country has too few abortionists for the present high demand. We must not be satisfied with a mere reduction of abortions. All around the world, our whole Jewish people should be saying loudly that 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. The babies' bodies have been found in locations that are not even hospitals or clinics. These crimes are symptoms of the lesson, "If you do not want a baby, you may kill him." How can the Jewish mind be horrified by these abominable acts while thinking nothing of aborting a child who is only a few minutes younger, still completely or partially inside the mother's body? What is the difference? All of these actions are either moral or immoral.

At what point do we decide to draw the line? The great majority of aborted babies have no physical or mental "defects." Legal abortion already has opened the door to the idea that any person who is just not good enough in someone else's opinion may have his life ended. If you do not want someone around, you have the right to kill him, especially if he is weak in one way or another. This

is the true core of abortion philosophy. It puts each one of us in danger at some unknown, future point of time in each of our lives when a family member, casual acquaintance, doctor or complete stranger might decide that we are not worthy of living any longer. Therefore, legal abortion is a serious threat to all humanity.

RESPECT FOR ANIMALS

If a friend offers us a puppy or kitten to keep, do we take it from his arms, only to slay it the very next moment? Jews learn to value human life over that of animals, but we still must treat animals with respect and compassion. The Torah tells us to let our beasts of burden rest on the Sabbath. We feed all of our domestic animals every day. Kosher laws of slaughter command us to cause the least possible pain in the killing of an animal. We care how animals are slaughtered for our consumption, how they are used in scientific research, and how some species are endangered, but we seem blind to the slaughter of unborn humans. Concern for animal life over that of humans is contrary to Jewish law.

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 draw from this is that animals are to be respected more than humans. Thus, in our culture, children and teens attack their schoolteachers, other children and the elderly, and commit rape. America has the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but any effort to prevent the cruelty of abortion is looked upon as a threat to American freedom. How can any of this make sense? Do we not thank God for giving us intelligence — a brain with capacity far beyond that of animals? How can we concern ourselves with animals' rights while at the same time say that we are pro-choice concerning our fellow human beings?

A GOOD JEWISH MOTHER

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and he went in unto her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. And the women said unto Naomi: 'Blessed be the Lord, who hath not left thee this day without a near kinsman'. . . and they called his name Obed; he is the father of Jesse, the father of David. Ruth 4:13, 14, 17

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. Had she chosen an abortion, we would not exist.

Some women think that they are too old to bear a child. If a woman in her forties is pregnant, she often elects to have an abortion. Perhaps she thinks that her family size is already perfect or that her activities cannot possibly include this bothersome, tiresome task. This is how the pro-choice culture teaches women to think. It is not the Jewish way. It is anti-family. Any circumstances of parenthood that are less than optimum have to be viewed as having much less importance than does the standard of preservation of life.

For mother-love and father-care,
For brothers strong and sisters fair,

For love at home . . . Father in Heav'n, we thank Thee.¹⁴

A child or teen should never need to wonder if he ever was or will be denied any siblings due to abortions by his own mother. We call our synagogue women's groups "sisterhoods" and our men's groups "brotherhoods." Where and how is the feeling of sisterhood and brotherhood put into action regarding the unborn among us? Each one is simply our little sister or our little brother.

Samson's parents listened very carefully to the angel who foretold his birth. They showed profound honor to that angel because they felt the hand of God in that entire experience. Jewish parents of today need to be just as serious in their view of their responsibilities toward God. Unusual or unappealing aspects of care for either the pregnant mother or the child after birth should not be looked upon as excuses for abortion.

Fear thou not, for I am with thee,
Be not dismayed, for I am thy God;
I strengthen thee, yea, I help thee;
Yea, I uphold thee with My victorious right hand. Is. 41:10

Is fear or unhappiness about the inconvenience of motherhood sufficient justification for killing one's child? Certainly a Jew should not think negatively of a human being who has not even been born yet. 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. Who would want to be judged this way before he breathed his first breath?

A pro-abortion culture teaches a 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? According to our tradition, 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

We shudder when we study our history throughout the ages, and discover the types of heinous, unspeakable crimes that were inflicted upon us. All of the individual "Hamans" in our own history, like the villain in the Biblical story of Esther, looked upon us as scapegoats for their real or imagined problems. In this way, they were pro-choice advocates. These "Hamans" 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.

Who is like unto Thee, Almighty King, who decreest death and life . . . ¹⁵

This is how we proclaim one of the fundamental ideas of Torah; life and death decisions are God's, and God's alone. Throughout the centuries, did our martyrs not die for the sake of Torah?

HOPE

We looked to America and the State of Israel for protection from the persecution that we suffered everywhere else. Are we supporting persecution all over again by being pro-choice and supporting killing our own unborn flesh and blood? How can we say that we care about our survival as a people, yet continue to kill unborn Jewish babies? Jewish girls and women often wear necklaces which spell "chai," Hebrew for "life." The Jewish people lives? Am Yisrael chai? Do we love our people and our pro-life heritage, or do we not? When we observe one of our memorial days, Tishah be-Av, we should commemorate, along with all of our national calamities, all of the abortions that we have committed among ourselves in America, Israel, and elsewhere worldwide.

And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: 'Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying: On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel; ye shall say unto them:

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;

The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

So shall they put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.'

Num. 6:22-27

If we are pro-choice, then we really do not mean this prayer for all of us. The benefits of this blessing are denied to those who have been aborted.

We wish each other a sweet new year on Rosh Hashana as we eat honey and apples. We pray for a year that has no end to our joy as we eat the specially baked round bread, the challa, that has no end. 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 a sweet year?

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.”

How can Israel be a convincing messenger of peace — whether in the Middle East or in the Diaspora — if we have the blood of our own aborted children on our hands, or if we have voted for pro-choice government leaders? “Shalom,” Hebrew for “peace,” is our greeting; it is also our wish as we part. We crave and treasure peace. Abortion is war of a country’s own inhabitants upon themselves. It is the mighty’s overpowering of the weak. How can we expect other individuals or nations to respect and care for the weak and disadvantaged if we ourselves are pro-choice?

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. The people who influence them are convincing, seeming to care for the mothers’ best interests that are protected and called “her rights” by America’s government. The mothers are courteously ushered by these professionals with advanced degrees into clean, calm surroundings for pregnancy advice and for the abortion itself. Because characteristics such as these create the complete impression that abortion is the civilized thing to do with an unplanned pregnancy, the mothers often agree to abort. If the descriptions of all of these factors were the complete opposite, pregnant women would resist abortion with a fight. 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

May the time not be distant, O God, when Thy name shall be worshiped in all the earth, when unbelief shall disappear and error be no more. Fervently we pray that the day may come when all men shall invoke Thy name, when corruption and evil shall give way to purity and goodness, when superstition shall no longer enslave the mind, nor idolatry blind the eye, when all who dwell on earth shall know that to Thee alone every knee must bend and every tongue give homage. O may all, created in Thine image, recognize that they are brethren, so that, one in spirit and one in fellowship, they may be forever united before Thee. Then shall Thy kingdom be established on earth and the word of Thine ancient seer be fulfilled: The Lord will reign forever and ever. On that day the Lord shall be One and His name shall be One.¹⁶

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.

Deut. 6:4

Proclaiming this, the Shema, which is Hebrew for “hear,” means that we believe in one God, Who is not a United States Supreme Court judge, and one Law, which is not the U. S. Supreme Court’s rulings. His Law states what He determines is right or wrong. This prayer 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, 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. In that world that we envision, the committing of all sin will end. We Jews are not to be content with non-emergency abortion nor partial-birth abortion because these oppose our tradition; Jewish participation in abortion that is not seriously restricted to types which our faith allows is a disgrace among us. Support of casual, unlimited abortion is denial of the Shema. That sort of abortion is a throwing of it onto the ground, a squashing of it underfoot, an obliterating of it from our prayer book, a sponging of 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 today are offensive to God, and therefore sinful because 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. Our basic purpose for avoiding any behavior should not be fear of punishment. 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.

Please send any comments to the author:

sherrydavison@yahoo.com

Sherry Davison
56 Tennyson Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14216
(716) 873-5306

NOTES

1. Talmud, quoted in The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, Dr. J.H. Hertz, C.H., ed., London, Socino Press, p. 14
2. The Union Prayerbook for Jewish Worship - Part II, The Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York, 1973, p. 228
3. The Union Prayerbook for Jewish Worship - Part I, The Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York, 1972, p. 101
4. Ibid., p.102
5. Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book, The Rabbinical Assembly of America and The United Synagogue of America, United States, 1973, p. 21
6. Part I, p. 75
7. David Reardon, "JAMA Gymnastics: Jumping through hoops to prove abortion is safe," The Post-Abortion Review, The Elliot Institute, Springfield, Illinois, vol. 1, no. 2, Summer 1993, pp. 4, 5
8. Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Earth Is the Lord's & The Sabbath, Harper & Row, New York, 1966, p. 9
9. Part I, p.101
10. Ibid., p.101
11. S.H. Sonnenschein, "Hark, the Voice of Children": Union Hymnal - Songs and Prayers for Jewish Worship, The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1936, p. 156
12. Pentateuch, p. 201
13. Ibid., p. 14
14. "We Thank Thee": Hymnal, p. 276
15. Festival, p. 29
16. Part I, pp. 71, 72

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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

The Holy Scriptures. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945.

The Pentateuch and Haftorahs. Dr. J. H. Hertz, C.H., ed. London: Soncino Press, 1973.

Reardon, David. "The Abortion/Suicide Connection." The Post-Abortion Review. Springfield, Illinois: The Elliot Institute, vol. 1, no. 2, 1993.

----- "JAMA Gymnastics: Jumping through hoops to prove abortion is safe." The Post-Abortion Review. Springfield, Illinois: The Elliot Institute, vol. 1, no. 2, 1993.

Rue, Ph. D., Vincent M. "The Forgotten Fathers: Men and Abortion." Heartbeat. fall, 1984.

Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book. United States: The Rabbinical Assembly of America and The United Synagogue of America, 1973.

Union Hymnal: Songs and Prayers for Jewish Worship. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1936.

The Union Prayerbook for Jewish Worship, Part I. New York: The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1972.

The Union Prayerbook for Jewish Worship, Part II. New York: The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1973.