



WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM

Reform Jewish Texts & Values

Life is sacred in Judaism. Banning potentially lifesaving medical procedures and interfering with a doctor's best medical decision-making runs contrary to the Jewish commandment to protect life. In addition, restricting abortion, contraceptives, and other family planning methods to only those who can afford or access them also contradicts the Jewish commandment to protect life.

This understanding, combined with a biblical and rabbinic emphasis on human dignity (kavod ha'briyot), has led the Reform Movement to view the life of the pregnant individual as paramount, placing a stronger emphasis on protecting existing life than on potential life (Exodus 21:22-23). The great physician and Rabbi Maimonides said, "if a woman is in hard labor, her life takes precedence over [the fetus'] life."

It is due to the intrinsic Jewish belief in the sanctity of life that abortion is viewed under some circumstances as both a moral and necessary decision. In the Mishnah Ohalot 7:6, a woman is forbidden from sacrificing her own life for the fetus, and if her life is threatened, she is allowed no other option but abortion. In addition, if the individual's mental health is at risk, their life should take priority, giving them no option other than to terminate the pregnancy.

The Reform Movement interprets the phrase "her life comes before its life" to not only mean abortion is permitted and necessary when someone's physical life is in jeopardy. It also means that the life of the person who is already living, their future aspirations, plans, and dreams, must also be taken into consideration.

Rabbi Marci Bellows, in her article, ["Choice. Period."](#) in the New York Jewish Week, reminds us that for the "first forty days following conception, the fetus is considered "mere fluid" (Mishnah Yevamot 69b). Rabbi Bellows reminds us that even Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, formerly of the Israel Supreme Rabbinical Court, supports some abortions even when the harm being avoided by abortion is non-lethal. And that is why the Reform Movement has expressed

its support since 1929, and the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice states, "I am pro-faith. I am pro-family. I am pro-choice."