

Abortion and Jewish Law

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Abortion and Jewish Law – Partial birth abortion

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The sanctity and infinite worth of every human being is a quintessential Jewish value, grounded in the biblical notion that man is created in the divine image and likeness to the creator. According to the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 4:5) “Whoever destroy one life is as if he destroyed a whole world”.

Abortion is permitted, and perhaps even required in cases of serious danger to the mother according to Jewish perspectives. However for convenience it is prohibited. When the majority of the fetus has emerged... the mother and the child are co-equal and you can not take one life / soul for another life / soul.

In essence abortion is judged to be the unwarranted taking of a life within a life it is the same prohibition as murder. Unless the Torah / Jewish law permits it.

One of the ultimate goals of man is the imitation of G-d. We do this in every good act, paralleling G-d's own creation of good. The most direct way that we can do this, however, is in our actions toward our fellow man.

G-d's purpose in creation could have been fulfilled with the creation of a single creature to accept His good. Such a creature, however, could never truly resemble G-d. G-d Himself

is a bestower of good, and if only one creature existed, then to whom would it do good? Certainly not to G-d, for G-d has no needs. It is for this reason that G-d created the world as an arena for an entire species of man.

When G-d first created man, Adam was one. G-d then said (Genesis 2:18), "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper as his counterpart." As long as man was alone, he could not really be good. For to be good is to imitate G-d, the giver of good. A man alone would have no one to whom to bestow good, and therefore, could not be called "good." This is what G-d meant when He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." G-d then created woman as a counterpart of man.

Man also imitates G-d by becoming His partner in the procreation of children. Just as G-d is a Creator, so man also becomes a creator of life. Our Sages therefore teach us that there are three partners in the procreation of a child: his father, his mother and G-d. The sexual act is the vehicle through which man displays this aspect of his partnership with G-d, and this is one reason why its perversion is considered among the worst of sins (Derech Mitzvotecha by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch).

In a spiritual sense, the good that man does also benefits every other human being. Thus, in doing good, one is at least indirectly benefiting his fellow man, even in the case of ritual laws that do not directly do so. Our Sages thus teach us that every person is morally responsible for every other. The author of Reshit Chochmah explains that all souls are bound together, as with rope, and the movement of one is reflected in every other. This is what the Torah means when it says (Numbers 16:22), "One man sins, and anger is directed against the entire community." The Midrash provides us with an excellent example illustrating this: A number of people are sitting in a small boat. All of a sudden, one man begins to drill a hole under his seat. When the people complain, he

retorts, "What complaint do you have? After all, I'm drilling the hole under my own seat." Finally, a wise man answers him, "We are all in the same boat. The hole may be under your seat, but the water that comes in will make the boat sink with all of us in it."

In a spiritual sense, we are all in the same boat. Every good thing that we do affects all mankind. In every good act that we do, we imitate G-d insofar as we ultimately bring good to all humanity. This is indeed one reason why G-d put us all in the same spiritual boat.

Of course, we do this more directly when we do good toward our fellow man. This is the archetype of all good. There is no way of imitating G-d more closely than in doing good to others.

The Talmud says that we bind ourselves to G-d by imitating His ways. But in what ways does the Talmud say that we imitate G-d? Look at its words carefully:

Just as G-d clothes the naked, so shall you. Just as G-d visits the sick, so shall you. Just as G-d comforts the bereaved, so shall you.

Elsewhere, the Talmud says that we must also imitate G-d in His mercy and compassion. The general lesson is that we resemble G-d most in our relationship with our fellow human beings.

This concept is best exemplified by the famous story of Hillel. The Talmud tells us that a non-Jew once came to Hillel and said, "I wish to convert to Judaism, but only if you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot."

Hillel replied, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. This is the core of Judaism. The rest is mere commentary."

Many of the commentators find this story very perplexing. The

commandments dealing with our relationship toward our fellow man are certainly very important. But there are also many other important commandments that apparently have nothing at all to do with other people. How could Hillel have dismissed these as mere commentary?

What Hillel was teaching us, however, was that the main reason for all the commandments is the imitation of G-d, and that this is exemplified by our relations with our fellow human beings. We must deal with our fellows just as G-d deals with us. In doing so, we fulfill His purpose in creation. This imitation of G-d is ultimately the purpose of all the commandments.

This is also the meaning of what G-d told His prophet (Jeremiah 22:16), "He judged the cause of the poor and needy, and it was well. Is this not to know Me?" As discussed earlier, we can only know G-d by drawing close to Him through imitating Him. G-d is telling us that the main way in which we know Him is by imitating Him in doing good to others.

There is a commandment in the Torah (Leviticus 19:18), "You shall love your neighbor like yourself." One of our foremost leaders, Rabbi Akiba, said, "This commandment is the core of the Torah." Rabbi Akiba is teaching us the same lesson as Hillel. We imitate G-d's love for the world through our love toward our fellow man. In this way, we draw ourselves close to G-d and fulfill His purpose in creation.

In a deeper sense, the concept of love itself is the archetype of spiritual closeness. Where a bond of love exists between two people, they are close – even though they may be separated by vast distances. On the other hand, people who hate each other are far apart, even when they are sitting right next to each other. Love and hate exist in a spiritual, rather than a physical dimension. Love between two people implies a harmony and complementarity between them. It is this harmony that makes them close, irrespective of physical distance. In

obeying G-d's commandments, we seek to bring a similar harmony and closeness between ourselves and G-d. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" is therefore indeed the prime rule of the Torah. It not only leads us to a closeness to G-d, but also teaches us the meaning of such closeness.

Following a similar line of reasoning, we can understand what our Sages mean when they teach us, "He who denies the doing of kindness (Gemilut Chassadim) is like one who denies the most fundamental principle (G-d Himself)." G-d is the ultimate bestower of kindness, and one who divorces himself from such deeds, places himself poles apart from G-d. G-d is the ultimate doer of good, and this man denies doing good. He is therefore said to be like one who divorces himself from G-d.

G-d is the source of all life, and therefore, the more one resembles G-d, the more he partakes of life. One who clings to G-d is said to be truly alive, as the Torah says (Deuteronomy 4:4), "You who have clung to G-d are all alive today." We thus find (Proverbs 10:2), "Charity saves from death." When one gives, he resembles his Creator, the source of all life.