



THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE SYDNEY

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Stem Cell Research And The Religious Duty To Save Life A Jewish Perspective

Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence

Jewish law establishes the saving of life as a value which transcends almost every other. One may not save a life, however, at the expense of another existing, innocent life. We are not at liberty to determine for ourselves which of two lives is of greater value.

Even though Jewish law draws distinctions between a fetus and a life in being, it remains broadly hostile to abortion unless the mother's life is at risk. In many regards, Jewish law does not relate to the fetus except as a part of the mother.

A non viable early embryo, which is not within the mother, through, for example, abortion or pre-implantation is not considered to be a human life.

Leading rabbinic authorities have given their support to the use of existing embryos for stem cell research, mindful that Jewish law concerns itself that such embryos are only appropriately obtained.

Stem cell research offers great hope to many sufferers and contains the potential to rectify painful, debilitating and life shortening genetic conditions. The much vaunted "slippery slope" argument against genetic research offends against the significant religious tenet not to stand idly by the blood of one's neighbour.

Judaism teaches that it is morally right to abort a potential life in order to save the threatened mother. If it is in our scope to develop cures, cultivating the genetic material that is already at hand, without destroying a viable life, is it not even more appropriate and morally justified that we act to save lives?

Properly conducted, research into the saving of life is a part of our human mandate to act in the image of God, to heal and to be merciful. It is an endeavour which religion and religious practitioners endorse.



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The opportunities which stem cell research provides should be seen to reinforce and not diminish the sanctity of life.

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