



Judaism and Health Care Planning

A Conversation with Rabbi Joseph B. Meszler

What is the role of a Rabbi in guiding his or her congregants to explore spiritual well-being with respect to health care planning discussions during times of wellness as well as during advanced illness or at the end of life?

A rabbi can be very helpful when making health and end of life decisions, especially well in advance of a medical crisis. People are always welcome to make an appointment with a rabbi, come to Shabbat services at a synagogue, or attend a class. Synagogues generally have an “open door” policy.

Topics that can be discussed with a rabbi include connecting through community, prayer, discussing beliefs about God and what you believe happens to you after you die, relationships with loved ones, inner strength, courage, insight, peace of mind, and hope.

Moreover, Jewish law has guidance for issues on what constitutes a healthy life, visiting the sick, help for caregivers, extreme illness, the treatment of pain, discontinuation of treatment, hospice, organ donation, and many other topics.

In addition, many Jewish books from all denominations exist on issues of medical ethics and the practice of Judaism, but these should be studied with a rabbi for personal and complete understanding.

Is it correct that the teachings and principals of Judaism exemplify a “community model,” always serving to reach those in the community who are most vulnerable and in need of care, either due to serious illness or nearing the end of life?

Judaism is a community religion, from hallowing the names of our ancestors to needing a quorum for a complete prayer service.



Offering support to and receiving help from community is an important part of Judaism and is best achieved through affiliation to a synagogue. Together we fulfill the "mitzvot" (commandments) of being a healthy part of a community, emotional balance through prayer, insight through Torah study, visiting the sick, communal prayers for the ill, and serving on a synagogue "hesed" (loving kindness) committee to help those in need.

In these times of modern medical technologies and advanced treatment choices, in what ways do Jewish traditions offer guidance and tools to individuals and families making choices in health care planning?

Judaism offers guidance in making end of life decisions. Every situation is different and should be done in consultation with a rabbi. In general, Judaism holds life and healing to be of ultimate value. In fact, saving a life overrides all other commandments. Each human life, regardless of quality, is sacred.

However, Jewish law tries to find a balance between the therapeutic use of medicine versus unnecessarily and briefly delaying someone's otherwise imminent death. Every life situation is unique.

How can adults, who are re-examining their spiritual beliefs, reconnect with their faith to explore health care planning questions more deeply?

We can be generous and loving as everyone has different questions and journeys in life when finding a path to reconnect with their faith. A place to start may be making an appointment to speak with a Rabbi in your area. All are welcome.

Biography

Rabbi Joseph B. Meszler has been the spiritual leader of Temple Sinai of Sharon, Massachusetts since 2005. He loves to teach and be a part of people's spiritual journeys. Rabbi Meszler is the author of several books, including *Facing Illness, Finding God: How Judaism Can Help You and Caregivers Cope When Body or Spirit Fails* (Jewish Lights Publishing 2010). Read more at www.temple-sinai.com; or visit Rabbi Meszler's website at www.rabbimeszler.com