

It will come as a surprise to no one that the Torah, and Judaism generally, apparently values human life above all else. Rare are the cases to be found in the Jewish story and in halacha where human life is not the primary value that trumps all other behavior and ideals. The story of the akeida – of Abraham offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice to the Almighty and at the last moment being prevented by Heaven from so doing – is illustrative of this idea of the sanctity of human life.

However as noble as this idea is, it many times wilts in the face of dire practical circumstances. The best and worst example of this problem is the conduct of war. There is no war without killing humans and the Torah in its narrative and value system certainly recognizes war as a reality and sometimes as a necessity.

The current debate in the Western world regarding the funding of stem cell research faces the moral dilemma of the permissibility of killing human fetuses in the process of possibly saving other humans from diseases, genetic and otherwise.

In the Torah itself, the kind, hospitable and righteous Abraham himself goes to war to rescue his kinsman Lot. It is obvious that the value of human life, dominant as it is in Judaism, is never quite absolute. And this therefore poses the moral questions that every generation, nation and even an individual eventually must face in life and society: When is taking a life justified?

Halacha provides some guidance on the subject, allowing for self defense, preemptive strikes and the execution of criminals who threaten society's existence. Jewish history also provides us with some insight on the matter, approving suicide, for instance, over forced conversions or a life of shame.

Because of this elasticity in what appears at first to be an absolute value, many questions are raised - and almost always in heartbreaking instances. The question of mercy killing and euthanasia remains on the agenda of the rabbinic responsa in our time though it is basically forbidden in Jewish society. Abortion is also opposed in Jewish law but individual respectable rabbinic advisors and decisors in some exceptional instances have allowed it.

The general rules and outlines are clear but in individual cases the matter becomes fuzzy. Maybe that is why Midrash sees Abraham himself as being conflicted over the issue of the akeida even after the angel of G-d instructs him not to sacrifice Isaac. The supreme test lies in the ability of humans to conform their behavior to G-d's will. That is the only truly absolute value in Judaism which allows for no exceptions or deviations. ... [..continued inside]

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Parshas Vayera
October 22-23

פרשת וירא
ט"ו חשוון



Shabbos Schedule



Candle lighting:	5:53pm
Mincha - Friday:	5:53pm
Parsha Chaburah by Naftali Perlberger:	7:55am
Rabbi's Mishlei Shiur:	8:15am
Shacharis:	8:45am
Sof Zman Krias Shema:	10:02am
Kiddush this Shabbos is community sponsored.	
Mincha:	5:50pm
Medical Halacha Shiur given by Dr Daniel Eisenberg. Chabura by Rabbi Yehuda Seif on Kofin Al Middas S'dom - Halakha's Conception of a Just Society.	
Maariv:	6:54pm

Our Sofer Stam, Rabbi Shmuel Bodenheim, will be coming to YIML to do tefillin and mezuzah checking on Sunday, November 7th after 8am Shacharis. Rabbi Bodenheim can be reached at (h) 212-781-5385 or (c) 917-620-0803.

Weekday Davening Times

Shacharis: Sunday:	8:00am
Monday and Thursday:	6:40am
Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday:	6:50am
Mincha/Maariv: Sunday:	5:50pm
Maariv: Monday through Thursday:	7:45pm
Candle Lighting and Mincha Friday:	5:44pm

Weekday Shiurim

Daily Mussar Shiur:	15 minutes before Shacharis
Mishna Brura:	Mon and Wed after Maariv
Father-Son Melachim Aleph Shiur:	Monday at 8pm
Halacha Shiur:	Tuesday at 8:30pm.
Nefesh HaChaim:	Thursday at 10:10pm

Women's Learning Experience - Fall Session

Mon at 9:00am: Tehillim for Cholim.
Mon at 9:30am: Steven Goldman teaches Parsha HaShavua.
Tues at 9:30am: Rabbi Shmidman teaches Tehillim at LMS.
Wed at 9:00am: Rachael Biberfeld teaches Michtav M'Eliyahu.
Thurs at 9:30am: Rabbi Steinberg teaches The Chozen Ish-Faith and Trust.
All classes at 8 Concord Circle, unless otherwise noted. For information or free babysitting, call Janis Fine 610-888-0477.

The Chevra Mishnayos is learning Seder Zeraim. See shul bulletin board to sign up or email eisenber@pol.net with your name and the masechta (and chapters) you intend to learn.

Bnos of Bala Cynwyd from 3:30 to 4:30pm at LMS. Contact Meira Friedman at 610-617-9529 for more information.
Pirchei of Bala Cynwyd from 3:30 to 4:30pm on the Lower Level at LMS. Contact Rabbi Ari Silver at 610-668-6833.

Abraham is rewarded for his willingness to sacrifice his son and he is rewarded for not actually going through with the sacrifice. The common denominator in Abraham's seemingly contradictory behavior is his constant willingness to accept G-d's will and behave accordingly. This attitude has become the basis for all halachic decisions and Jewish behavior over the ages – the continued attempt to understand and follow through upon G-d's will. That is Abraham's legacy to us.

Adapted from "Abraham's Will is G-d's Will" by Rabbi Berel Wein
<http://www.torah.org/learning/rabbiwein/5771/vayera.html>

Rabbi Jeremy Kagan, Scholar in Residence Shabbaton, Nov 12 and 13.

Rabbi Jeremy Kagan has been the principal of Midreshet Tehillah since its founding in 2002. He was a senior faculty member at She'arim College of Jewish Studies for Women, and taught at Meor Beis Yaacov Seminary, Ma'alot Seminary, Moreshet, and Machon Yaakov.

Born in Boston and raised in Hawaii, Rabbi Kagan went to Yale University, graduating with a BA in philosophy. He first became interested in traditional Judaism while traveling in Israel during his college years. He returned to Israel to pursue Talmudic studies following the completion of his degree at Yale, eventually becoming a student at Heichal HaTorah B'Pressburg and the Mirrer Yeshiva. He received rabbinical ordination from Rabbi Zalman Nechemiah Goldberg and has regularly attended the Shiurim of Rabbi Moshe Shapiro.

Rabbi Kagan published *The Jewish Self: Recovering Spirituality in the Modern World* (Feldheim, 1998). The book has been hailed by many educators as a major breakthrough in honestly bridging the vision and understanding of the Torah with our actual experience of the modern world - essential both for the observant Jew trying to make his Torah real and for the non-observant trying to make Torah relevant. Rabbi Kagan is in the process of publishing his second book, *The Choice to Be: A Jewish Path to Self and Spirituality*.

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