

<b>Mitzvot, Moral Principles &amp; The Sanctity of Life</b>		✓
<b>Mitzvot</b>	<p>Mitzvot is the Hebrew for 'commandments' or 'obligations' (singular: mitzvah). There are a total of 613 mitzvot in the Torah. They can be divided into 'positive' and 'negative' mitzvot, and 'ritual' or 'ethical' mitzvot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Positive Mizvot</b> command certain actions (Thou shalt ... ..)</li> <li>• <b>Negative Mizvot</b> forbid certain actions (Thou shalt not ... ..)</li> <li>• <b>Ritual Mitzvot</b> create the relationship between Man (Humans) and G-d.</li> <li>• <b>Ethical Mitzvot</b> create the relationship between people - man and man (or women!)</li> </ul> <p>In addition to positive and negative, ethical and moral mitzvot, there are also <b>Chukim</b> and <b>Mishpatim</b>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Chukim</b> - mitzvot humans <u>cannot</u> understand.</li> <li>• <b>Mishpatim</b> - mitzvot humans <u>can</u> understand.</li> </ul> <p>Religious Jews don't need to understand 'why' certain rules or obligations exist. They follow the rules because they are given by G-d.</p>	
<b>Different views about the Mitzvot</b>	<p>Not all Jews agree about how many Mitzvot there are. The Talmud says that there are 613 mitzvot, but it doesn't provide a full list. Several great Jewish scholars have compiled their own complete lists where they agree on most, but not all, of the mitzvot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sa'adya Gaon</b> (882-942 CE) - was one of the earliest scholars to write a <i>Book of the Commandments</i> and divides the laws into twenty six categories.</li> <li>• <b>Samuel ben Hofni</b> (died 1034 CE) - listed fewer than 613, as the laws in some of his categories overlapped.</li> <li>• <b>Hefez ben Yazliah</b> (10<sup>th</sup> Century) - produced 800 pages which explained each law in detail.</li> <li>• <b>Maimonides</b> (1135-1204 CE) - wrote his own <i>Book of the Commandments</i> which widely criticised the work of his predecessors.</li> </ul>	
<b>Divine Providence</b>	<p><b>Divine Providence (<i>hashgahah</i>)</b> is the belief that G-d controls and guides the world in two ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "<b>general providence</b>" - G-d's care for the world in general and for species in general.</li> <li>• "<b>special providence</b>" - G-d's care for each individual human being.</li> </ul> <p>However, Jewish people also believe that every individual human being has <b>Free Will</b> - the freedom to make their own choices and decisions.</p>	
<p><b>Common and Divergent Views:</b> As a direct result of their different beliefs about the status and authority of the Torah, different groups within Judaism have different views about how strictly they need to keep the mitzvot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ultra-Orthodox Jews e.g. the Chasidim, and Modern Orthodox Jews believe that all 613 mitzvot are commandments or obligations given directly by G-d to the Jewish people, therefore they must all be obeyed or observed. They go to great lengths to ensure that their daily lives comply with every mitzvot.</li> <li>• Reform Jews believe that the mitzvot were written by community leaders, inspired by G-d, in order to deal with issues in their society at a particular time and place in history. They believe that they are free to abandon or modify laws which are outdated and irrelevant in modern society, and free to choose which ritual practices they observe. i.e. the ones which elevate them spiritually. The ethical mitzvot MUST be kept.</li> </ul>		

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<b>The Sanctity of Life</b>	One of the great teachings of Judaism is that human life is sacred. The account of Creation, describes human beings as created "in the Divine image" (Genesis 1:27) introducing the idea that human life is special. Judaism has a supreme concern for the sanctity of human life. According to the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 4:5): <i>Whoever destroys one life is as if he destroyed a whole world, and whoever preserves a life is as if he preserved the whole world.</i>	
<b>Pikuach Nefesh</b>	The obligation to preserve or save life. The preservation of human life takes precedence over all the other commandments in Judaism. For example, when life is involved, all Sabbath laws may be suspended to safeguard the health of the individual, the principle being <i>pikkuah nefesh doheh Shabbat</i> - [rescuing a] life in danger takes precedence over the Sabbath. One is not merely permitted-one is required to disregard a law that conflicts with life or health.	
<b>Fertility Treatment</b>	The first mitzvah given to humans was to 'multiply' i.e. have children. In the Torah, we see that being unable to have children (infertility) was a source of difficulty and often seen as a curse. Judaism approves of the use of scientific breakthroughs. It sees G-d as the spiritual partner to life, but humans are commanded to do what they can to create new life.	
<b>Abortion</b>	Judaism will disagree with abortion generally, as this prevents potential life from being created. Abortion may be permitted in Jewish law if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• physical health is seriously threatened</li> <li>• mental health is seriously threatened</li> <li>• The pregnancy is as a result of rape</li> </ul> The foetus has a life-threatening or quality of life threatening condition.	
<b>Euthanasia</b>	Jewish people believe that life is G-d given. It is forbidden by Jewish law to offer euthanasia even if the ill person themselves requests it. Judaism disagrees with active euthanasia because it views that every effort must be made to continue life. However, passive euthanasia may be different. This is when life-prolonging treatments are stopped when a patient has a life-threatening illness, and nature can take its course, while keeping the patient as comfortable as possible.	
<b>Organ Donation</b>	Jewish law will support organ transplants from a living donor. However, no one is obliged to do this, as there is always a risk to life. Generally it is permitted in Orthodox Jewish law to use an organ from a dead person provided that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the donor is halakically dead <b>and</b></li> </ol> there is someone ready to receive the organ (and that it is not just donated to medical science).	
<b>Animals</b>	There are many Jewish laws that protect animals. e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the 7 Noachide Laws forbids animal cruelty.</li> <li>• Animals must also rest on Shabbat.</li> </ul> At the same time, animals are permitted to be killed for food, but never for sport. Animal life does not have the same value as human life. Experiments on animals are allowed in Jewish law if it will lead to finding a cure for disease or improving medical procedures.	
<b>War</b>	Judaism does not regard violence and war as always wrong. Certain kinds of war will be ethically justified, and that it is sometimes morally acceptable to kill people, if it promotes justice. If the Jewish people are attacked, they are obliged to defend themselves.	
<b>Capital Punishment</b>	Jewish Law does allow for capital punishment for certain crimes. However, the Talmud states that a court that carried out a death penalty once in seventy years was considered bloodthirsty! Jewish courts must try every possibility to avoid carrying out capital punishment.	
<b>Common and divergent views:</b> Attitudes towards Pikuach Nefesh should be universal across all groups within Judaism, as Pikuach Nefesh relates to ethical mitzvot and ethical situations. However ... .. because G-d has given people Free Will, they are free to make their own personal choices with regard to these issues.		