

# Jewish Beliefs and Teachings: Life on Earth

What does the specification say?

Life on earth

➤ Beliefs and teachings about the nature and importance of Pikuach Nefesh (sanctity of life): Genesis 1:26-27, Talmud B Yoma 84b, Psalm 139: 13-15, Jeremiah 1:5

**KEY CONCEPT VOCABULARY (KCV): Sanctity of Life (KCV from Issue 2)** – *the idea that life is special and cannot be taken in any circumstance for example Jews believe that G\_d created the world and has given human beings a special role to fulfil. Pikuach Nefesh is the concept that saving a human life is more important than any mitzvot. It is belief in the sanctity of life. Life is holy and belongs to God, which means that only he can give it and only he can take it. It is taken from Leviticus 18:5: “You shall keep My laws and My rules, by the pursuit of which man shall live.”*

## The Nature and Importance of the Sanctity of Life

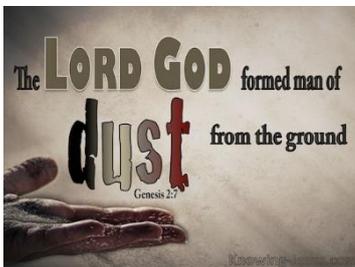
### Sanctity of Life + Pikuach Nefesh - The importance found in creation:

There are two creation accounts found in the Jewish holy text. The Torah opens with Genesis 1 and gives us a six-day creation story. The importance of life is stressed in this account with humanity being created in the image and likeness of G\_d. The concept of **sanctity of life** is drawn from this.



**RT** “*God said, 'Let us make man with our image and likeness. Let him dominate the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock animals, and all the earth - and every land animal that walks the earth.' God [thus] created man with His image. In the image of God, He created him, male and female He created them.*”

(Genesis 1:26-27) – Judaism’s emphasis is on life and not death. The Genesis creation account show that G\_d has created life with a purpose for human beings.

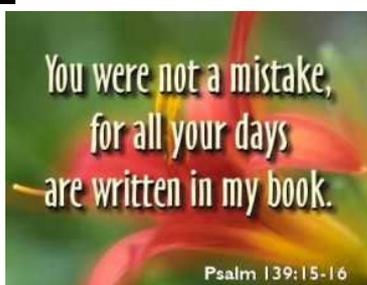


The second creation account begins at **Genesis 2:4a** with the Adam and Eve account. In the opening verses of the account ‘The Man’ is formed out of the dust of the ground and G\_d breathes into the man’s nostrils the breath of life\*. For many Jews, this is seen as the divine breath within. It is thus sacred so life should be protected as only G\_d can decide when life is taken. Many Jews pray in the following in the morning prayer (shacharit): “*My G\_d, the soul you placed within me is pure. You created it, you fashioned it, you breathed it into me.*”

**RT** – \**“Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being”.* (Genesis 2:7)

These accounts are largely read figuratively (meaning non-literally) rather than literally but some Jews may still believe they are factual accounts of how G\_d created the world. There are two other important quotes that stress the importance of life coming from G\_d:

**RT** - “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.*” (Jeremiah 1:5) – this shows G\_d has a plan for everyone and that life is precious; *‘For you created my inmost being; you knit me together*



*in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.’* (Psalm 139:13-15) – This also shows the care G\_d takes for everyone. According to Jews, G\_d has planned all our lives out and life to sacred because of this.

## What are the implications of G\_d's creation on the Sanctity of Life and Pikuach Nefesh?

There are several implications that can be drawn from the belief of G\_d's creation in Genesis surrounding the **sanctity of life** and **pikuach nefesh**. They are as follows:

- 1) Only G\_d can decide when someone lives and dies – see below for **Deuteronomy 30:19** and **Ecclesiastes 3:2**

RT – *'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live'* (Deuteronomy 30:19) and *'a time to be born and a time to die'* (Ecclesiastes 3:2)

- 2) The mitzvot (613 laws or commandments) are made for people to live by HOWEVER saving a human life is more important than any mitzvot (you cannot follow G\_d's laws if you are dead!). – see the first KCV box for **Leviticus 18:5** and the **Talmudic** quotes below. *[The Talmud is made up of two parts the Mishnah and the Gemara. Together they are referred to as the Talmud or the Oral Torah. These are comments made by rabbis over the years on the 613 mitzvot/commandments found in the Torah. They have been collected and written down so that Jews can refer to them for help or guidance in following G\_d's commandments.]*

RT – *'Whoever destroys a single life is considered as if he had destroyed the whole world, and whoever saves a single life as if he had saved the whole world.'* (The Talmud (MISHNAH Sanhedrin III)); **"AND WHEREVER THERE IS DANGER TO HUMAN LIFE, THE LAWS OF THE SABBATH ARE SUSPENDED"** (The Talmud (B. Yoma 84b))

- 3) Jews believe they have a duty to 'heal the world' for G\_d by creating JUSTICE in the world. This is known as Tikkun Olam. We create justice when we provide equality for all and stamp out injustice **'Tend well to the earth, for there is no-one to make it right after you.'** Talmud.

### Pikuach Nefesh Through Tikkun Olam and Breaking the Sabbath Law:

In Jewish tradition there is a strong emphasis on the importance of caring for others. The phrase **TIKKUN OLAM** is an instruction to 'repair the world'. In Judaism it is a mitzvah

(commandment) for individuals to be generous, making **GEMILUT**

**HASADIM** [acts of lovingkindness through giving up time and skills] towards others. This extends to saving lives on the Sabbath. This is significant as Jews are not supposed to 'work' during their holy day.

**"AND WHEREVER THERE IS DANGER TO HUMAN LIFE, THE LAWS OF THE SABBATH ARE SUSPENDED"**

(The Talmud (B. Yoma 84b)) tell Jews they can suspend all the mitzvot apart from incest, idolatry and murder to save the life of a sick person. Life is seen as more important than the laws G\_d has made as it

says in Leviticus 18:5: "You shall keep My laws and My rules, by the

pursuit **of which man shall live."** Doctors and other caring professionals can therefore break the

commandment to **'Keep the Sabbath Day holy'** (Exodus 20:8). Jews can perform organ donation

due to Pikuach Nefesh as it saves lives (After **Alisa Flatow** died in a bus bombing, her family

donated her heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas and corneas to save the lives of others). To

preserve life, you can travel on Shabbat and break fast during Yom Kippur (the day of atonement -

one of the most important holy days in the Jewish calendar).



### Pikuach Nefesh Through Living Life to the Fullest:

The Jewish community believe that not only should they have absolute respect for life, they should try to live it to the fullest. They believe that G\_d will judge their actions here on Earth. The Torah (the five books of the law) is often referred to as the 'tree of life' as its mitzvot can only be followed on Earth. Good deeds like gemilut hasadim have a habit of spreading other good deeds.

RT – *'It is a tree of life for those who grasp it, and all who uphold it are blessed'* (Proverbs 3:18) – This shows the importance of the Torah as a guide for all who follow it.

### The Importance of Life Seen in Jewish Worship and Lifestyle:

During celebrations, especially at weddings, 'L'Chaim' is said. It means 'to life'. The word 'Chaim' is a plural word and some think this means that we cannot live alone. We need others to perform the mitzvot and acts of kindness. When someone dies, Jews wish the relatives 'long life'.