

**Question:** As a physician I know that in being truthful with my patients I retain their confidence as well as my own self-respect. But it is not always possible for me to disclose all I know or have reason to suspect. I feel at times that the interest of my patient is better served if I withhold from him information of a shocking nature. Having lived all my life in religious surroundings, I have often wondered what Jewish religion has to say on the subject. Am I ever justified, on religious grounds, in keeping the truth from my patients? (1954)

**Answer:** It has been established that in order to maintain peaceful relations between people, the bare truth can be appropriately disguised. For instance in the case of a sick person's close relative dying, the truth may be concealed in order that extra mental disturbance is not inflicted. In the case of the death of a close relative dying the truth may be concealed also from someone who themselves are dying, so that they may die with "a hopeful tone in an atmosphere free from any display of grief". The Physician who respects the truth and maintains truthful relation with all persons, need have no qualms of conscience when, in certain special cases, in pursuit of the good of a patient, he complies with the requirement of the situation and suppresses what appears to him to be the truth.

**Question:** A young woman has contracted German measles in the third month of her pregnancy. Her doctor says that her sickness creates the possibility that the child, if born, may be deformed in body or mind. Some doctors, however, seem to doubt that this will happen. May she, according to Jewish law, or to Reform interpretation of Jewish law, have an abortion done to terminate the pregnancy? (1958)

**Answer:** A discussion is held on when a fetus becomes a nefesh (soul/person). According to the Mishna and the Shulchan Aruch this happens when the head or parts of the fetus emerge, into the light. The late Sephardic Chief Rabbi, Ben Uzi-El made the ruling that until then the fetus is not a nefesh and has no independent life. The fetus can therefore be destroyed for the mother's benefit. The Reform answer rules along this line, but talks of the necessity to consider the ethics involved in destroying a potential life, without due consideration.

# PHILOSOPHIC TRADITION

Michael Paley and Jacob Staub summarize the enterprise of medieval Jewish philosophy as follows: "It was the attempt of Jewish thinkers in the medieval period to come to terms with the fact that the fundamental beliefs that they inherited from biblical and rabbinic traditions were apparently in conflict with the dominant scientific and philosophical theories of the cultures in which they lived". This can actually serve as a general summary of the field of Jewish philosophy: it represents the dialogue at different times of history between Jewish thinkers and the surrounding world-views. Although hundreds of important Jewish philosophers lived, thought, and wrote throughout the generations, we will focus on five works: one from the ancient world, two from the medieval, and two from the modern.

