



We Trust Women
The Women's Rabbinic Network Responds to Attacks
on Women's Rights
May 15th, 2019 – 10 Iyyar 5779

Recent legislation severely limits women's access to medical care, from "heartbeat bills" in Georgia and Ohio to yesterday's news of Alabama effectively banning abortion in every case other than serious risk to the life of the woman. As rabbis and as women, the Women's Rabbinic Network responds:

1. We believe every woman has a right to choose what happens to her body. We also value human life and its potential.
2. The Talmud teaches (BT Sanhedrin 32b): "'Justice, justice shalt thou follow' (Deut. 6:20). Where two boats sailing on a river meet: if both attempt to pass simultaneously, both will sink, whereas, if one makes way for the other, both can pass [without mishap]." The pursuit of justice means negotiating between two competing values. By allowing for one to take precedence over the other, both values are preserved.
3. We trust women. The ability God gave to women to carry potential life comes with power and responsibility, and we trust women to carry out the blessings and questions that come with this extraordinary capacity. While not every woman is able to or chooses to have children, it is nonetheless certain that legislation which diminishes women's right to choose thereby questions women's ability to be moral, ethical, loving, and thoughtful about life and its potential.
4. We believe that pro-choice is pro-gender-equity. At this moment in time, we must ensure the equal rights of women. After millennia of various forms of subjugation, this moment in time calls upon humanity to affirm the equality of all God's creatures regardless of gender identity and its presentation. Legislation which limits a woman's right to choose what happens to her body is a continuation of this subjugation. Without the ability to control our own bodies, women are not free, not equal.

5. Our Jewish tradition has wrestled with these questions throughout time. It teaches us that the fully actualized life of the mother is prioritized over the potential life of an unborn child until the time of birth. When, like two ships passing in a river, one must yield, the fully manifest life of the mother takes priority even when the nurturing instinct of burgeoning parenthood may be the opposite.

6. As Jews, we are part of a long-standing Jewish legal tradition which parses out each individual case. We reject sweeping legislation which attempts to regulate every situation without consideration of each individual circumstance. It is the Jewish way to use the wisdom of tradition to guide decisions in individual circumstances. We trust each woman to draw on her own tradition and make the best decision for herself with the people around her, her doctors, her spiritual leaders, and her own sensibilities in each unique case. We trust every woman to make the decisions impacting her body.

7. We value relationships as sacred. Just as women must navigate the sacred trust of pregnancy, we also hold dear the relationships with others who hold points of view different than this one. We welcome and honor thoughtful dialogue and disagreement for the sake of heaven, for the sake of further understanding, and for the sake of coming closer together as one humanity imbued with Divinity in all its wondrous forms.