

TEN THOUGHTS ON JEWISH BIOETHICS AND PUBLIC POLICY  
BY  
RABBI PETER S. KNOBEL

1. Judaism is about personal and collective meaning of life.
2. It begins with a reflection on texts.  
It is a conversation between texts of our people and the texts our lives.
3. Jewish ethics begins with an assumption that there is duty to God.
4. Jewish ethics are rooted in the Jewish narrative which challenges both the Enlightenment narrative and the narrative of other religions.
5. Most Jewish bioethics follows a halakhic or quasi-halakhic model.
  - A. It seeks to discover what is permitted and what is prohibited
  - B. It is about acts not persons
  - C. What is required is an aggadic ethic, which provides a range of acceptable choices based on the collective Jewish narrative as applied to the story of individuals
6. Jewish Ethics are prophetic.  
Speak truth to power.  
This is the transition from ethics to public policy.  
This requires a serious reflection on such topics as:
  1. The nature of a just society
  2. The application of the Exodus story of liberation
  3. The meaning of relationships such as Ruth and Naomi
  4. The concepts of health and wellness
  5. Wholeness, brokenness and illness
  6. Abundance and scarcity
 It means offering a genuine Jewish textual reflection on these and other issues to inform the workings of the Religion Action Center or other advocacy bodies.  
It is more than attaching a verse to a resolution and saying that it represents a serious Jewish position.
7. People live in communities.  
We are part of different communities including the human community.  
The context of decision-making must reflect our situation in family, community, country, and humanity.
8. An ethics of encounter.  
Ethics is a transaction between persons.
  1. Reflection on caregiver–patient relationship
  2. Cost benefit, individuals, society and justice
  3. It is about persons not about acts, procedures, medications

## 9. Academic Ethics and Practical Ethics

1. Bring together
2. Translation of the theory (or abstract, anonymous reflection) to the bedside, etc.

## 10. Ethics of Imagination or Imaginative Ethics

I have one unshakable belief.

If we can conceive it eventually we will be able to do it.

Therefore: we must develop an ethics of anticipation.

We need to consider the consequences of our acts before we are capable of performing them.

### A. Genetic engineering

1. Privacy
2. Valuing the less than perfect
3. The disassociation of procreation and sexual intercourse
4. What constitutes a family

B. Are there limits to our use of knowledge? Must we do everything of which we are capable?