

A Reconstructionist Approach to Understanding Abortion

Teacher's Guide

Introduction:

Abortion is a difficult topic to discuss with high school students. It is challenging to approach an issue about which people feel very strongly on all sides. We need to take care not to put down the decisions of our students, their families and their loved ones.

Discussing abortion also requires mature students who are able to think about sexual issues in a serious manner and work through nuanced approaches to ethical quandaries.

While mindful of these constraints, we have a responsibility to discuss abortion with mature students in our Jewish schools. It is important for students to be exposed to various positions in the debate on abortion that is so present in our society. They should be informed about their community's beliefs on the issue and begin to form their own opinions. Some of our students may also be forced to confront abortion in more personal terms as they or someone they care about considers an abortion.

Discussions on abortion reach far back in Jewish history and continue today, building layer upon layer, as people continue to innovate, and technology creates new questions. This curriculum uses traditional Jewish texts as a starting point for discussing abortion. As Reconstructionist Jews, it is important for us to know how our ancestors struggled with and decided upon issues. Throughout the curriculum, students also are encouraged to think through their own personal views through journaling, small groups and larger teacher-led discussions.

Goals:

This curriculum will introduce students to some aspects of how traditional Jewish texts consider abortion, including excerpts from Torah, from the Babylonian Talmud and from medieval commentators, including Rashi and Rambam (Maimonides). Students will learn from this curriculum not only about positions on abortion but also about traditional concepts of life in Judaism.

Even more broadly but equally importantly, students will begin to understand how the distinctively Jewish system of *halacha* (Jewish legal code) is formed. Each generation of commentators sought to demonstrate that their position was in some way supported by earlier texts. While this approach may initially strike modern Jews as backward or unprogressive, it is important not to overlook that these commentators demonstrated the antiquity of their arguments even as they made radically innovative new claims. Innovation in a system with boundaries requires creativity and mental agility. You can encourage students to absorb and play with this approach by forcing them to support their claims by what they have learned about Jewish law. They can use the texts from this curriculum or Jewish values they have learned elsewhere, like *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), and *shalom bayit* (peace in the home).

Teacher's Role:

Your primary job in this curriculum is to be a guide and resource person. It is important for you to explore your own (possibly evolving) views on abortion before you begin to teach this topic. It is also important for you to be open to students who may feel very differently from you. Showing respect for a multitude of opinions and insisting that students show respect for each other will create an atmosphere in which students feel empowered to share and explore. As you read through the curriculum, you will find that there is a wide range of positions taken throughout Jewish history by different Jews. You might want to highlight these differences to students, demonstrating that dissonance has always been a part of Jewish study. Some students may hold positions different than those represented in any Jewish texts. Judaism provides a framework, and students should feel free (even expected) to build on that framework. Students should be able to explain their positions and how they relate to traditional Jewish understandings.

A Note on Using Traditional Jewish Texts:

Using Jewish texts presents an additional challenge for an already challenging topic. While some of these texts may strike students as compassionate and meaningful, some will surely shock and offend your students' sense of morality (and probably your own as well). Your job is not to be a defender of the tradition. You should talk about the changing view of the equality of women throughout time. Students should be encouraged to express their concerns or even outrage at some texts. They may ask why they should consider traditional Jewish texts to be relevant to their beliefs on abortion, if the men who

wrote such texts were clearly sexist and elitist. You should anticipate that question and have ready an answer that feels most true to you. Here are some possibilities:

1. Kaplan wrote that in Reconstructionist Judaism the past has a vote but not a veto. That means our tradition will enrich our lives. It also means that we have the right to change those aspects of Judaism that are no longer meaningful to us. We don't have to defend what is morally repugnant to us: we have a responsibility to help Judaism to evolve.

That the past has a vote means that we must struggle to hear the voices of our ancestors. What did this custom or that idea mean to them? How did they see the presence of God in it? How can we retain or regain its importance in our own lives? That the past does not have a veto means that we must work to hear our own voices as distinct from theirs. What might this custom or that idea mean to us today? Kaplan's statement that the past does not have a veto implies that tradition is susceptible to adaptation. Innovation need not entail the destruction of tradition; on the contrary, change is an important part of keeping tradition alive, as it has been throughout Jewish history.

Exploring Judaism, A Reconstructionist Approach, by Rebecca Alpert and Jacob Staub, pp.41-42

2. If we want to have integrity about who we are as a people, we have no choice but to remain linked to our tradition.

The problem of the status of the Jewish woman is not confined to Eretz Yisrael. In the Diaspora, it is bound up with the entire question of the future development of Judaism. If Judaism were to develop along classical Reform lines [i.e. we determine that traditional commentators were wrong on women and thus ignore them completely] the problem could be regarded as solved. But it would be solved with the same kind of success as that of the surgical operation which, from the surgeon's standpoint, may be entirely successful even though the patient is dead.

The Future of the American Jew, Mordecai Kaplan, p.410

Texts that you should be familiar with before you begin teaching this curriculum:
These texts are more complicated and require your preparation before you attempt to teach them.

Texts for Day One: These texts examine different medieval commentators' approaches to when human life begins.

A. Mishnah Ohaloth 7:6

האשה שהיא מקשה לילד. מחתכין את הולד במעיה ומוציאין אותו אברים אברים. מפני שחיה קודמין לחיו. יצא רובו אין נוגעין בו. שאין דוחין נפש מפני נפש:

In the case of a woman [mortally] struggling to give birth, one dissects the child in her womb and draws it out limb by limb because [the mother's] life comes before the child's life. Once the greater part of the child has emerged, we do not do so, because we don't sacrifice one life to save another.¹

Notes: This Mishnah is puzzling (the Mishnah often leaves out clarifying information). What changes to allow us to kill the child to save its mother during birth but once the greater part of the child emerges we may not do so? The Talmud and many medieval commentators seek to answer this question.

B. Rashi's comments on Sanhedrin 72b provide his answer:

יצא ראשו - באשה המקשה ומסוכנת' וקתני רישא: החיה פושטת ידה וחותרתו ומוציאתו לאברים' דכל זמן שלא יצא לאויר העולם לילד נפש הוא וניתן להורגו ולהציל את אמו' אבל יצא ראשו - אין נוגעים בו להורגו' דהוה ליה כילוד ואין לאו חין נפש מפני נפש' ואם תאמר מעשה דשבע בן בכרי (שמואל ב' כ) הנה ראשו מושלך אלך דדחו נפש דו נפש - התם משום דאפילו לא מסרוהו לו היה נהרג בעיר כשיתפשנה יואב והן נהרגין עמו' אבל אם מפ הוא ניצול אף על פי שהן נהרגין לא היו רשאים למסרו כדי להציל עצמן' אי נמי: משום דמורד במלכות היה הוה' והכי מפרש לה בתוספתא (דתמורה) (מסורת הש"ס: דתרומות פ"ו).

Commenting on “once the baby’s head has emerged”:

In the case of a woman who is struggling to give birth, and she is in danger, the midwife stretches forth her hands and dissects the baby and draws it out limb by limb because as long as s/he hasn't emerged into the world, **s/he is not a person** (“*lav nefesh hu*”), and it is permitted to kill him/her to save his/her mother. But once his/her head has emerged, we can't harm him/her because it as if s/he is born (or is a person), and we don't sacrifice one life to save another...

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations by the author of this curriculum.

Notes:

“Once the baby’s head has emerged” is slightly different but equivalent to “once the greater part of the child has emerged” in the above mishnah. There was some dispute over at which precise moment the transition occurred.

Rashi comments throughout the Talmud, often drawing from his vast Talmudic knowledge to explain difficulties. He lived in France in the 11th century. Rashi clarifies that once the baby’s head has emerged, the baby is a person. Before that instant, the fetus is not a person. Rashi’s comments seem to agree with the above Torah text about the lesser status of personhood for fetuses.

C. Rambam’s comments

לא תעשה שלא לחוס על נפש הרודף. לפיכך הורו חכמים שהעובדה שהיא מקשה לילד מותר
אף זו מצות
ובר במיעיה. בין בסם בין ביד מפני שהוא כרודף להורגה. ואם משהוציא ראשו אין נונין בו
לחתוך הע
שאין דוחין נפש מפני נפש וזהו טבעו של עולם.

This is also a negative commandment that one must not protect the life of a pursuer. Therefore the sages taught that in a case of a woman who is struggling to give birth, it is permitted to dissect the child in her belly, either through drugs or by hand (surgery), because he is like one who pursues her to kill her. But once his head emerges, we don’t harm him because we don’t sacrifice one life for another, and this is the nature of the world.

Mishneh Torah Rozeach v’Shemirat Nefesh 1,9

Notes: The Talmud holds that a person can only be found guilty and punished for a crime if he had been warned against committing it. However, there is a special case of the pursuer. When a person is chasing someone to kill her, a third party need not go through the process of formally warning the pursuer against committing the crime, because during the time it takes to give the warning, he might kill his victim. Instead, the third party must kill the pursuer to stop him from killing his victim. Here, Rambam, a 12th century philosopher, scholar and physician living in Egypt, makes use of this Talmudic ruling. He suggests that the fetus in the womb is a pursuer and like any other pursuer must be stopped by killing him/her. **Rambam does not discuss the differences between a fetus and any other pursuer; indeed he seems to consider them of equal legal status in this regard.** If a fetus is of equal legal status and can be killed only when it is pursuing the life of its mother, then the range of permissible abortions is severely limited under Rambam’s construct. Once the baby’s head emerges, Rambam claims, we can no longer kill it to save its mother because the baby is no longer the pursuer but rather natural causes are (which he learns from the Talmud in Sanhedrin 72b). Rambam’s position seems problematic to me because it is unclear why the onus of the birth struggle would shift from the fetus to natural causes once the baby’s head emerges.

Texts for Day Two: The texts for day one examine the case of a fetus killed to save its mother. The texts below examine the relative value placed on a fetus' life compared with a person's life in medieval Judaism. These texts are helpful in considering a wider range of conditions surrounding abortion than in Day One.

A. Exodus 21:22-25

וכי ינצו אנשים ונגפו אשה הרה ויצאו ילדיה ולא יהיה אסון ענוש יענוש
כאשר ישית עליו בעל האשה ונתן בפללים ואם אסון יהיה ונתתה נפש תחת
נפש עין תחת עין שן תחת שן יד תחת יד רגל תחת רגל כויה תחת
כויה פצע תחת פצע חבורה תחת חבורה

If men fight, and hurt a pregnant woman, so that her fetus depart from her, and no further harm (to her) follows; he shall surely be punished, according to what the woman's husband will assess in arbitration. But if any further harm (to her) follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

Notes:

This is the primary biblical text upon which the Talmud and later commentators base their opinions on abortion. Note that this text is not actually about a woman choosing abortion but rather about another person accidentally causing the destruction of the fetus. There is no biblical text that describes a woman choosing to abort her fetus.

B. Rashi's comments on the Biblical excerpt

Commenting on "and if there is further harm": to the woman

Commenting on "You shall give life for life": Our rabbis argue about this thing. There are those who say literally a life (death sentence) and those who say monetary fine but not a life literally. Because they intended to kill one person and killed another, they are exempt from a death sentence and must pay to her heirs for her blood [at a price] as if she were sold in the marketplace.

Notes: Because their murder of her was unintentional, they pay only a fine. The fine is determined by her monetary value to her family, as is done in the American legal system. Rashi is one of many medieval Biblical commentators. Rashi's comments are often based on his knowledge of earlier Jewish understandings of the Biblical text, recorded in midrashic texts.

The above Torah text is unclear when it says, "if no further harm follows." In my above translation, I included in parenthesis "to her," thus basing my translation on Rashi's comments that the Biblical author is referring to further harm to the woman and not to the fetus. Thus, according to Rashi and traditional Jewish commentators' understanding of this elusive text, if the fetus was killed but not his mother, then it is only a civil crime and the guilty one only pays a fine. If, however, the mother is also killed, then it is murder, a capital crime, and the guilty one must give a life for a life. **Killing a fetus is not the same as killing a person. It is not murder.**

Interestingly, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible in Alexandria in the third century, understands this text very differently. It understands the Hebrew word “ason” – translated above as “harm” - to be “form.” Thus, it translates the text, “If there be no form [to the fetus] ... he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is form [to the fetus] then you shall give life for life...” Thus, killing an older, more formed fetus is considered murder while killing a younger, less formed fetus is not. While the Jewish community largely did not accept this interpretation, Philo, the famous first-century Jewish philosopher, read the text according to the Septuagint’s interpretation (Feldman, 257-8).

Day One – When Does Life Start?

I. Introduction

Ask the students how old they are. They will answer with a number based on their birthdays. Press them to ask if this is really when their lives began. Some students may insist that this is when their lives began, while others may believe that life for them began before birth.

II. Text Study:

A. Explain before the students read the texts: *Terumah* was the priests' share of crops, given to them by the rest of the Israelites. Because *terumah* was connected to Temple worship, only people of a certain status, connected to the priests, were allowed to eat *terumah*. Priesthood was passed down through families. While women could not become priests themselves, if their fathers were priests, they were entitled to eat *terumah*.

B. Depending on how experienced your class is with text-study, you may want to break into *hevrutah* (study pairs) or remain as a group for this first text-study. If you have never studied texts with your students before, explain to them that text-study is different from merely reading. Encourage them to go very, very slowly, looking at each word. They should read each text several times. The idea is to ask many questions of the texts when they are unclear or leave something out.

C. Have the students read Leviticus 22:12-13. Tell them to look for what the text includes and what it does not include.

The text includes: the cases of a daughter of a priest after she has married, after she has gotten divorced or is widowed and does not have children. It also suggests that during her youth (before marriage) she could eat *terumah*.

By implication we can surmise that if she is divorced or widowed and has children that she cannot eat *terumah*.

The excerpt does not include: the case of a son (because he himself is a priest – priesthood is passed down to sons), the case that the rabbis in the Talmud explore – a pregnant woman who has gotten divorced or is widowed.

D. Have the students look at the excerpt from Talmud. Remind them that it is complicated and encourage them to read it several times. Afterwards, see if students can explain the arguments of Rav Hisda and Abaye.

In this case, the woman is widowed and does not have any children, but she may be pregnant, which would disqualify her from eating *terumah*. However, if she is not pregnant, she can return to eating *terumah*. She does not fit neatly into either category of childless women or women who are mothers. Rav Hisda and Abaye disagree over whether or not she is eligible to eat *terumah* during the early days of her pregnancy, when she would not know for certain whether or not she is pregnant.

Rav Hisda believes that she can eat until the fortieth day because even if it turns out she was pregnant the whole time, until the fortieth day the fetus is merely fluid.

Abaye believes that if, after forty days, it turns out that she is pregnant, then she has been sinning during those forty days. He does not explicitly correct Rav Hisda's statement that the fetus is merely fluid (and thus doesn't count), but he seems to believe that a fetus, even in its early stages, is enough to disqualify her. He is concerned about the end of the Biblical verse, which emphasizes that a layperson may not eat *terumah*. In addition, Leviticus 22:14-16 state that a person who eats *terumah* unwittingly has to pay a fine and also that the priests must not allow ineligible people to eat *terumah*.

- E. What do Rav Hisda and Abaye believe about when a fetus becomes viable? Are their beliefs relevant only in determining when a woman can no longer eat *terumah* (which no longer exists because there is no Temple) or can we think about their beliefs in a larger context? (Hint: Rav Hisda and Abaye also lived in a world in which the Temple was already destroyed, and *terumah* no longer existed.) How can you imagine each rabbi would advise a woman who wanted to abort a fetus who was less than forty days old? With whom do you agree?
- F. If there's time, look at the contemporary medical description of a fetus from What to Expect When You're Expecting. How does science change how we view life?

III. Rashi vs. Rambam (Maimonides)

Rashi and Rambam, both rabbis from the medieval period, had very different views about when life begins. They both agreed that if a woman is in a very difficult labor and will die if the fetus is not killed, then you must kill the fetus to save her. However, their reasoning is very different, and their arguments reveal their ideas about the start of life.

Divide the class into two teams: Rashi vs. Rambam. Each team must write a letter to the editor as either Rashi or Rambam demonstrating the rabbi's view on when life begins, based on the texts and background information in the handouts. Remind each team that they should read their opponent's statement as well as their own. You will need to help the Rambam group in particular to understand the import of Rambam's statements. (For more information, see The Teacher's Guide, Texts You Should Be Familiar With, Day One)

Interestingly, the debate that we are staging today could not have happened. Apart from the fact that Rashi and Rambam lived in different parts of the world and a century apart, Rashi's commentaries were unknown to Rambam (Roth, 561).

Handout for Text Study, Day One

Text Study One:

If a priest's daughter marries a non-priest, she may not eat *terumah*, but if the priest's daughter is widowed or divorced and without offspring, and is back in her father's house like in her youth, she may eat of her father's food. No layperson may eat of it.

Leviticus 22:12-13

בת כהן שנישאת לישראל ומת - טובלת ואוכלת בתרומה לערב! אמר רב חסדא:
טובלת ואוכלת עד ארבעים' דאי לא מיעברא - הא לא מיעברא' ואי מיעברא - עד ארבעים
מיא בעלמא היא. אמר ליה אביי: אי הכי אימא סיפא: הוכר עוברא במעיה - תהא מקולקלת
למפרעי! מאי מקולקלת? עד ארבעים

If a daughter of priest was married to a non-priest (Israelite) who died, she may perform her ritual purification and eat *terumah* that evening. Rav Hisda said, she performs her ritual purification and eats until the fortieth day because if she is not pregnant (on the fortieth day), then she wasn't pregnant (during those forty days). And if she is pregnant (on the fortieth day), **until the fortieth day it [the fetus] is merely fluid**. Abaye said to him, if so say the end of the clause (in Leviticus 22:13): If the fetus is discernible in her womb [i.e. people can tell she's pregnant], **she sinned retroactively**. She sinned – until the fortieth day!

Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 69b

By the end of the first month of your pregnancy, your baby (who's actually about two weeks old, if you're counting from conception) is a tiny, tadpole-like embryo, much smaller than a grain of rice. Though far from human-looking yet, the embryo has progressed considerably from the shapeless mass of cells it was just a week ago; already there is a head (equipped with a mouth opening), a primitive heart that has begun to pump, and a rudimentary brain. Arm and leg buds will appear soon.

What to Expect When Your Expecting, 109

Text Study Two:

Rashi:

In the case of a woman who is struggling to give birth, and she is in danger, the midwife stretches forth her hands and dissects the baby and draws it out limb by limb because as long as he hasn't emerged into the world, **he is not a person ("lav nefesh hu")** and it is permitted to kill him to save his mother. But once his head has emerged, we can't harm him because it as if he is born (or is a person) and we don't sacrifice one life to save another...

Commenting on Sanhedrin 72b

Background information on Rashi:

Rashi was born and lived in France in the 11th century. He studied in Mayence, Germany at the yeshivah of a famous rabbi, Rabbeinu Gershom. Rashi is the commentator par excellence of the Talmud and the Torah. His comments and his world view are based on

his studies of traditional Judaism in yeshivah. Not surprisingly, Rashi seems to agree with the majority of other Jewish scholars on this issue. Rashi was completely opposed to secular learning (Roth, 564). Rashi's knowledge of medical science is based primarily on the Talmud. He also knew a little about anatomy from working with cattle. While significant developments in health and science were available in Rashi's time, they were written in Arabic and thus inaccessible to Rashi. Rashi discusses health in many places, but his remedies fall into the category of folk medicine (Shereshevsky, 174).

Rambam (Maimonides)

This is also a negative commandment that one must not protect the life of a pursuer. Therefore the sages taught that in a case of a woman who is struggling to give birth it is permitted to dissect the child in her belly, either through drugs or by hand (surgery) because he is like one who pursues her to kill her. But once his head emerges we don't harm him because we don't sacrifice one life for another and this is the nature of the world.

Mishneh Torah Rozeach v'Shemirat Nefesh 1,9

Background Information on Rambam (Maimonides):

Maimonides lived in the 12th century in Egypt. He was a philosopher, rabbi and physician. In his medical works, he frequently refers to knowledge he gained among Muslims in North Africa. He studied medicine with his father and also formally in Fez, Morocco. He was very familiar with Arabic translation of Greek physicians' scholarly works (EJ, 755). It is difficult to pin down what exactly impelled Maimonides to take an approach so different from other Jewish leaders. In S.D. Goitein's exhaustive study of life for Jews in the 10th-13th centuries in Egypt (based on the Cairo Geniza), he suggests that children were beloved in this society: "The massive evidence of the Geniza proves that children, that is, sons, formed a prominent, central, and, so to say, public component in a man's life to a far higher degree than is customary in our own society" (224). However, I have no evidence to suggest the comparative value that Rashi's society placed on children. The society captured in the Cairo Geniza knew of family planning, albeit through methods that were not always reliable (230). Women and their husbands wrote freely about their pregnancies (231) but little about "inconveniences of pregnancy and death in childbed" (232). Maimonides was also no stranger to controversy and was not afraid to take stands that differed radically from those rabbis who had come before him.

Day Two: Ethics of Abortions

I. Ask students to share difficult decisions that they have had to make in their lives. How did they decide – what techniques did they use? Maybe they made lists, spoke to friends, meditated, prayed, flipped a coin... Write their answers on the board. You can also suggest that Jews can look to the Jewish tradition as another set of mentors to advise us when making difficult decisions.

II. Shaylah (question)/Teshuvah (answer)

Last time Rashi and Rambam debated about when life begins, but they both agreed that we can kill a fetus to save its mother.

There are many other cases when a woman (sometimes with the support of her family) decides to have an abortion.

Throughout the medieval Jewish world, Jews posed questions to their rabbis. When the local rabbis didn't know the answers, they sent the questions to more famous and learned rabbis. The questions were called *She'aylot*. Today you all will be the famous rabbis, answering *she'aylot*. These people have contacted you because they want your advice – responding that they should do whatever they want is not acceptable.

Divide the class into three groups. Each group must answer the question it is given, based on the background texts and its own sense of what is right. The students can also draw from other information they know, including the texts studied last time.

Have each group present their decision to the rest of the class, and allow time for them to comment on the decisions.

III. Journaling Time

Give students 10-15 minutes to journal about anything that has struck them during the last two lessons about Judaism or abortion. Encourage them to record feelings as well as thoughts. Afterward give students who want to the opportunity to share.

This curriculum will continue for one to two more days, focusing on more contemporary issues and factors.

Handout for Day Two

Case 1: Lisa Schwartz has two healthy children. She is pregnant with her third child, who has been diagnosed with Tay-Sachs, a devastating genetic disease. The child will not live long if carried to term and delivered. Lisa would like to know if you, her rabbi, would support her having an abortion. It is important to Lisa that you show her Jewish texts that could support her decision.

Case 2: Hannah Jacoby has been severely depressed for years. With medication and therapy, she has been able to function at a basic level, holding down a job and living alone. She recently became pregnant. Caring for a child is more than she feels she can handle, and the news of the pregnancy has thrown her into a severe episode of depression. She recently contacted you, her rabbi, concerned with her suicidal feelings, and wanting to know if she would be justified in having an abortion.

Case 3: Lena Abraham is a sophomore in college. She and her boyfriend had sex and were careful to use contraception. However, Lena has become pregnant. Neither she nor her boyfriend would be able to support a child financially, and Lena is worried that having a child would mean that she would need to drop out of school. She approaches you, her rabbi, to discuss having an abortion.

Texts:

Rabbi Jacob Emden (1697-1776) allowed abortion in a situation of “great need,” and “excessive pain” for the mother (quoted in Solomon, 186).

MISHNAH. IF A WOMAN IS ABOUT TO BE EXECUTED, ONE DOES NOT WAIT FOR HER UNTIL SHE GIVES BIRTH: BUT IF SHE HAD ALREADY SAT ON THE BIRTHSTOOL, ONE WAITS FOR HER UNTIL SHE GIVES BIRTH.

Talmud comments on BUT IF SHE HAD ALREADY SAT ON THE BIRTHSTOOL: What is the reason? — As soon as it moves [from its place in the womb] it is another body. Rab Judah said in the name of Samuel: If a woman is about to be executed one strikes her against her womb so that the child may die first, to avoid her being disgraced.

Arachin 7a, translated by Judaic Classics

FOR THUS WE FIND IN THE CASE OF CAIN, WHO KILLED HIS BROTHER, THAT IT IS WRITTEN [in the Torah]: THE BLOODS OF THY BROTHER CRY UNTO ME: NOT THE BLOOD OF THY BROTHER, BUT THE BLOODS OF THY BROTHER, IS SAID — i.e., HIS BLOOD AND THE BLOOD OF HIS [POTENTIAL] DESCENDANTS. (ALTERNATIVELY, THE BLOODS OF THY BROTHER, TEACHES THAT HIS BLOOD WAS SPLASHED OVER TREES AND STONES.) FOR THIS REASON WAS MAN CREATED ALONE, TO TEACH THEE THAT WHOSOEVER DESTROYS A SINGLE SOUL OF ISRAEL, SCRIPTURE IMPUTES [GUILT] TO HIM AS THOUGH HE HAD DESTROYED A COMPLETE WORLD; AND WHOSOEVER PRESERVES A SINGLE SOUL OF ISRAEL, SCRIPTURE ASCRIBES [MERIT] TO HIM AS THOUGH HE HAD PRESERVED A COMPLETE WORLD.

Sanhedrin 37a, translated by Judaic Classics

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