

Stem Cell Statement by the RCA and OU 2001

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July 26, 2001
6 Av, 5761

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush,

We write to you on behalf of this nation's largest Orthodox Jewish synagogue umbrella organization and Orthodox Jewish rabbinical organization with regard to a serious matter you are currently considering -- whether to permit federal funds to support embryonic stem cell research. On the basis of consultations with leading rabbinic authorities in our community as well as with scientists sensitive to traditional Jewish values, we write to express our support for federal funding for embryonic stem cell research to be conducted under carefully crafted and well-monitored guidelines.

As you no doubt appreciate, the decision you face is one with complex moral dimensions. On the one hand scientific research indicates that there is great life-saving potential in embryonic stem cell research, potential that warrants federal support. On the other hand, we must be vigilant against any erosion of the value that American society affords to human life, including potential human life.

Our Torah tradition places great value upon human life; we are taught in the opening chapters of Genesis that each human was created in G-d's very image. The potential to save and heal human lives is an integral part of valuing human life from the traditional Jewish perspective. Moreover, our rabbinic authorities inform us that an isolated fertilized egg does not enjoy the full status of person-hood and its attendant protections. Thus, if embryonic stem cell research can help us preserve and heal humans with greater success, and does not require or encourage the destruction of life in the process, it ought to be pursued.

Nevertheless, we must emphasize, that research on embryonic stem cells must be conducted

under careful guidelines. Critical elements of these guidelines, from our perspective, relate to where the embryonic stem cells to be researched upon are taken from. We believe it is entirely appropriate to utilize for this research existing embryos, such as those created for IVF purposes that would otherwise be discarded but for this research. We think it another matter to create embryos ab initio for the sole purpose of conducting this form of research.

Because of the ethical concerns presented by embryonic stem cell research and the reports of potentially garnering similar benefits from research on adult stem cells, we would urge you to simultaneously increase funding for adult stem cell research.

Other elements of an ethically sensitive oversight regime would include a rigorous informed consent process from future IVF procedure participants, a fully funded and empowered oversight body comprised of scientists and bio-ethicists, and periodic reviews by relevant Executive branch agencies and congressional committees.

We hope these views are useful to you in your deliberations over this critical issue of public policy. We wish you the paramount blessing for political leaders that the Jewish tradition offers - wisdom.

Sincerely,

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President, UOJCA

Rabbi Herschel Billet
President, RCA

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