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- [The Dalai Lama](#)
- [Prayer of the Day](#)
- [Spiritual Parenting](#)
- [Inspiration](#)

More

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GO

Dictionary

GO

- [Sacred Texts](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Houses of Worship](#)
- [Site Map](#)

Home > **Morality**

What Do World Religions Believe About Abortion?

Attitudes towards abortion differ sharply even within denominations. The information here is presented as a general guideline only.

Post on the Abortion [Message Boards](#)

WORLD RELIGIONS ON ABORTION

[Vasu Murti and Mary Krane Derr write](#) in the Fall 1998 issue of the Journal of Feminism and Non-Violence Studies that "Hinduism teaches that abortion, like any other act of violence, thwarts a soul in its progress toward God. Hindu scriptures and tradition have from the earliest of times condemned the practice of abortion, except when the life of the mother is in danger. Hinduism teaches that the fetus is a living, conscious person needing and deserving protection. Hindu scriptures refer to abortion as *garha-batta* (womb killing) and *bhroona hathya* (killing the undeveloped soul)."

HINDUISM

Islam prohibits abortion except when the mother's life is in danger. Muslims consider a fertilized ovum that is attached to the womb a living being that has the potential of reaching its full formation. A developed fetus is considered a human life and is subject to the laws of inheritance to the extent that if the mother is sentenced to capital punishment, her life should be preserved because she is carrying another human life.

ISLAM

Under the first of the five Buddhist precepts--to refrain from taking life, from insects on up the evolutionary ladder--abortion is proscribed. Life is deemed to begin as soon as consciousness arises, and fetuses are seen as having consciousness. The Buddha's rules for his community of monks also forbade anyone from recommending abortion. Some practitioners of Japanese Zen who have had a miscarriage or abortion honor or make an offering to the deity Jizo, the god of lost travelers and children. It is believed that Jizo will steward the child until it is reborn in another incarnation.

BUDDHISM

[According to](#) the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is, "Baha'is believe the soul becomes associated with the body at conception, and the deliberate taking of human life is generally not permitted. Baha'i writings clearly state that abortion merely to prevent the birth of an unwanted child is forbidden. Baha'i institutions do not legislate on the issue of abortion, and it is left to the individuals concerned to decide the best course of action."

BAHA'I

[According to](#) Rabbi Raymond A. Zwerin and Rabbi Richard J. Shapiro, writing for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, traditional Jewish law teaches

JUDAISM

that "the fetus is not considered a full human being, and has no individual rights, but rather, according to many sources, is a part of a woman's body. And just as any person may not voluntarily do harm to his or her body, a woman may not voluntarily abort a fetus. However, just as a portion of the body may be sacrificed to save a person's life, an abortion may be performed for the woman's overall well-being, and an existing life takes precedence over a potential life, if there must be a choice between them."

UNITARIAN- UNIVERSALIST

[According to](#) the Unitarian-Universalist Association's official position paper, the church "believes in the right of every woman to safe and affordable abortion services, including federally funded abortion counseling and abortion provision, and has called for governmental protection for abortion providers and women who receive abortions."

[American Baptist](#)

According to a position paper of the American Baptist Churches USA, the denomination "opposes abortion as a means of birth control or a means of eliminating unwanted pregnancies, but differs on when life begins and whether the church should advocate for governmental restrictions on abortion."

Catholic

The Catholic Church teaches that every human being has a right to life from the moment of conception. The church holds that every abortion--the willful killing of a human embryo or fetus--is a grave moral evil. The penalty for procuring an abortion is automatic excommunication. Formally cooperating in an abortion is a grave offense. [More-->](#)

Eastern Orthodoxy

The Orthodox Church teaches that abortion is the killing of a child. Grave questions like these are settled by the Holy Spirit's guidance, which is found pre-eminently in Scripture, and other writings and community decisions must be consistent with Scripture. From the earliest years, Christian writings have instructed "Do not murder a child by abortion or kill one who has been born" (The Didache, c. 70-80 C.E.).

[Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#)

According to the ELCA's official position paper, the church "believes abortion ought to be an option only of last resort. The church, in most circumstances, encourages women with unintended pregnancies to continue the pregnancy. The church, however, recognizes that there can be sound reasons for ending a pregnancy through induced abortion."

Latter-Day Saints

According to the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints considers elective abortion sinful, though not necessarily murder. A Latter-day Saint cannot have or perform an abortion except in the cases of rape, incest, the life of the mother being endangered, or a severely defective fetus that cannot survive birth.

[The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod](#)

According to the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod's official position paper, the denomination "believes abortion is contrary to God's Word and is not a moral option except in the tragic situation when it is necessary to save the life of the mother."

CHRISTIANITY [Presbyterian Church \(USA\)](#)

The Presbyterian Church (USA) says in official teaching that it "acknowledges legitimate diversity of opinion. Abortion can be acceptable under circumstances of rape or incest, physical or mental deformity of the fetus, or threats to the physical or mental well-being of the mother. Oppose its use as a method of birth control. Acknowledge that the state has at least a limited interest in regulating abortion, but believe in safe and affordable access to abortions for those deemed acceptable."

[Southern Baptist Convention](#)

According to the Southern Baptist Convention's official statement, "At the moment of conception, a new being enters the universe, a human being, a being created in God's image. This human being deserves our protection, whatever the circumstances of conception."

[United Methodist Church](#)

The United Methodist Church writes in its official statement that the denomination "believes in the sanctity of unborn human life and are reluctant to approve abortion. But they are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy."

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[Quizzes](#) | [Meditations](#) | [Prayer Circles](#) | [Memorials](#) | [Columnists](#)

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