

Assisted dying and the sanctity of life

Sir, Having read Rabbi Jonathan Romain's Thunderer (Apr 4) readers might conclude that Jewish tradition looks upon assisted dying favourably. Nothing could be farther from the truth. He asks "in whose interest are we forcing people to live on against their will?" The believing Jew would retort sharply that by divine command no less, man is enjoined to carrying on living; not because there is anything sacred about suffering per se but because there is something sacred about living itself. Man does not have the freedom to bring upon himself his own death; such a decision lies within the confines of the heavenly court alone.

Perhaps this Jewish mandate to carrying on living despite all the suffering and torment of old age or at the edge of the frightening abyss of death may seem to the younger,

western generation— which ranks material and mental comfort and the rights of each individual as values of the highest order — as a cruel and unforgiving one. However, it enshrines the very act of living itself with a holiness and dignifies its adherents, who, strong-willed, refuse to allow their suffering to become the only determinant in assessing whether to continue inhabiting this Earth.

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