

# Religious views on right to die



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### Public Policy: Right to Die

The right to die is one of the most controversial topics addressed by government that has been interpreted into the state laws that have either debated the right or allowed it, however recently with the “ Gonzales vs. Oregon” case where instead of the case being on constitutional grounds where it conflicts with the right of life, was put mainly on administrative law grounds which was shocking for many people. It helped reestablish the power of the “ Death with Dignity Act”, which allows anyone who has a terminal disease to have the permission through voluntary help from a physician to be given lethal medications. The idea of ending someone’s life out of mercy for them with their permission has always been an idea that seems very favorable to those who know they will die and don’t want to suffer, but also of issue to other people especially concerning their religion.

Some diseases such as several forms of cancer, Ebola, Creutzfeldt-jakob, AIDS, and others all have a form of pain it inflicts on people either cognitively or through actual unbearable pain that puts into the idea of allowing people to be able to kill themselves civilly and with dignity rather than have them suffer extensively and prolonging the inevitable. Most states, however, see the matter differently and do not allow for terminal patients to kill themselves through the careful attention of a physician who would administer the medications to them, for most argue that it conflicts with the freedom of life as it is protected through the first amendment of the constitution, and although many bills every year pass to enact the right to die in other states, most never are passed.

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Religion also comes into play when arguing to make the right to die nationwide as it conflicts according to parts of some religions. Christianity and Catholicism both recognize suicide as a form of sin and although it is assisted and done through careful procedures administered from physicians, it is mostly still seen as wrong through most church's and Christian's and Catholic's views. Hinduism has varying points of view on assisted dying as they say it conflicts with the body and soul separating at separate times, along with it affecting both the doctor's and the patients karma. Some religions, however, are actually very tolerant with the right and actually try to advocate for it to be passed as a law, for example, Methodists recognize the right to die as a form of the individual's freedom, Unitarian Universalists see it as the right of self-determination and allow it, and Evangelical believe it as a moral thing to do, so while most major religions would not normally approve, other religions recognize it through morals.

Rabbi Yitzchok Breitowitz also reveals the Jewish standing on the right to die and stresses that, the preservation of life, also known as pikuach nefesh in the Torah, is a very important thing that passes up basically all other commandments of the Torah. Breitowitz also explains that because as a Jewish belief, they believe in the soul rather than just the body, because they see the body as just a vessel for the person's true spiritual essence. Judaism doesn't accept the notion of sustaining life for longer than a human should be alive, because Judaism attempts to try and find a balance between the great mitzvah of prolonging life and the recognition that life may be unbearable or difficult as it's said in the Torah. The Torah also states that the body and the life a person is not our own to do whatever with and with that,

have no moral right to kill or hurt anyone else, or to hurt, kill, maim authorize another person to do those things to the person.

Frank Pavone, the international Director for the organization “priests for life” states the Christian view on the right to die comes from the idea that their life is not truly theirs to own, including their death. Pavone states that although the body is in a sense the person’s possession as it was given to them by God, it is still not their body alone as they are not the source of their own existence and is accountable for it to God. With not truly owning the body, Christians do not have the right to claim they have a right to die because a right is a moral claim and that there is no claim on death, rather it has a claim on them and that to this idea, Christians don’t have the authority to prolong their life.

Damien Keown, a professor of Buddhist ethics at Goldsmiths College in the University of London, expresses the Buddhist’s stand on the right to die and whether it should be legalized or not by stating that Buddhists generally oppose assisted suicide and euthanasia. This is due to the teachings that show the person that it is morally wrong to destroy human life, including one’s own, even if the intentions are just by attempting to end suffering, instead they are taught to have a great respect for life in general even if it is not being lived in an optimal way and by helping another or giving the authorization or being killed in a humane way, it affects both the doctor’s and the patient’s karma. Buddhists also believe that life really has no reason to be extended further than is required and that one should not go to any extraordinary lengths to try and preserve the life as all that matters is the

spirit being in line with life and sustaining good morals and having good karma.

Ayman Shabana, a member of the Islamic Legal Studies Program at Harvard Law School, shows the Islamic point of view on rejecting the legalizing of the right to die by stating that the Islamic teachings condemn the idea physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia because Islam Teaches the idea that God alone and determines how long someone should live and when they should die, which leads to a general reluctance that any kind of idea to end life prematurely because it's believed by many islams that those decisions should only be held only in the hands of God. The stand on the right to die is also influenced greatly by the belief that the suffering a terminal patient goes through is beneficial as there is a notion that the person has no idea whats good for them or not which leads to the traditional idea of the suffering viewed as a test of fate.

The United Church of Christ, however, is one of the few minorities that support the passing of the right to die to be in all states, because according to Reverend Timothy Tutt, the senior minister at Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ, they are taught to believe that each and every single person approaches God on their own terms, including the end of life. Despite the minority groups and religions that do support the right to die as both a moral idea and decision, many major religions do not agree with the passing of any bill that would allow this method of death as it would violate their First Amendment right of religion and until the day that major religions such as Christianity or Judaism accept the idea, the right to

die will never be seen in any other states other than the few that have already passed it.