

TORAH THOUGHTS – NEW JERSEY’S LAW FOR THE TERMINALLY ILL

On April 12, 2019, Governor Phil Murphy signed the Medical Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill Act. Effective August 1st, terminally ill adult residents of New Jersey may legally request and self-administer medication to end their lives in a humane and dignified manner.

There are many reasons that one with an incurable, debilitating disease would seek to end his or her life. In fact, New Jersey is the eighth jurisdiction in the country (including the District of Columbia) to allow terminally ill patients to end their own lives. Further, suicide itself is a legal act in all fifty states. Both reflect American ideology that, short of harming someone else, we inherit the right to do with our bodies what we will.

This is in sharp contrast to Judaism, which teaches that God ultimately owns our bodies, and we are not allowed to damage them in any way. For example, the Rabbis interpret the commandment, “But take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously ...” (Deuteronomy 4:9) to refer to physical wellbeing.

On Friday night, August 23rd at 7:30 pm during services, we will discuss further the new law and the Jewish perspective on end of life issues.

Shalom,

Rabbi Pont