

“Saving a Life”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

How great a value is *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life?

Although some make an exception for traveling to synagogue on Shabbat, the prevailing view among Jewish legalists is that travel on Shabbat is strictly forbidden. This is a powerful prohibition, but it may naturally be violated for a case of *pikuach nefesh*.

A Doctor may travel to the hospital on Shabbat to save a life. But an intriguing question was once asked of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the great Jewish legal authorities of modern times: After treating the patient at the hospital, may the doctor now return home? After all, there is no longer a question of saving a life. It is a clear violation of Shabbat.

As Rabbi David Feldman recounts in his compelling work, *Where There's Life, There's Life*, Rabbi Feinstein ruled that the doctor may return home. Why? For if he must remain at the hospital he might hesitate to go *the next time he is called*. Knowing that he will not be able to rejoin his family, he may rationalize that he is not really needed, and so eventually endanger a life.

Human beings are sacred sparks of the Divine. Caring for one another is a paramount moral obligation. The lesson of life's sanctity is central to Judaism — a lesson our imperiled world needs so desperately to learn.