

American man's kidney to give soldier new lease on life

Yaakov Katz , THE JERUSALEM POST

Jul. 19, 2007

Thanks to the selflessness of a Pennsylvania man, an IDF woman soldier's career which had been threatened by kidney failure will be allowed to continue.

Until January, Ayelet Katz was a regular soldier. She started her military service with a week of basic training in 2006 and was stationed at the Tel Nof Air Force Base, where she worked as an assistant to the head of human resources. But in May that all changed when Ayelet, 19, began to suffer from kidney failure to the point that she needed fulltime dialysis, forcing her to leave the IDF.

Born together with a twin brother, at the age of two Ayelet contracted an infection and was hospitalized in critical condition. Her body shut down and she slipped into a coma. When she awoke, doctors told Ayelet's parents that their daughter's kidney had been damaged and that the day would come when it would cease functioning entirely.

Now, however, all that is about to change. Thanks to the Halachic Organ Donor Society (HODS), Ayelet is scheduled to receive a new kidney in the coming weeks from Yosef Chiger, a 35-year-old American Jew who will be coming here next week.

"This is very emotional for me," Katz, from Moshav Be'er Tuvia, told *The Jerusalem Post* on Thursday. "I can't wait to meet Yosef and thank him for his sacrifice and donation."

Her father Ra'anan said that before he had heard of HODS, the family signed up on the local Israeli transplant list and began looking into other options abroad.

"The average wait in Israel is five years," he said. "It is unbelievable that please God, by August it will all be over."

Chiger, married and the father of a five-year-old daughter, told the Post that he was honored to have the opportunity to help Ayelet, who said that after the surgery she plans to return to Tel Nof to complete her military service. He said he began looking into the kidney-donation possibility after he moved away from New York, where he was a volunteer firefighter.

"I am ecstatic," he said in a phone interview from his home in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. "It is important for me that she is an Israeli and the fact that she was a soldier and only 19 years old means that hopefully she has a long life ahead of her and this will help her."

Until he came across the HODS Web site, Chiger was under the impression that it was only possible to donate an organ if you died. "I had no idea that this is something you can do while you are alive," he said.

Behind the planning of this complicated project is Robby Berman, who established HODS in 2001 to help people like Ayelet and to educate observant Jews about the importance of organ donations.

In 2004, HODS brought 38-year-old Eric Swim, a married father of two from Kansas City who was born a Christian but now observes Jewish ritual, to Israel. He donated one of his kidneys to Moshiko Sharon, a 10-year-old boy from Moshav Hodaya near Ashkelon, who underwent a successful kidney transplant at Schneider Children's Medical Center for Israel in Petah Tikva.

Berman said that it was unfortunate that not enough altruistic kidney donors were in Israel to help people like Ayelet.

"While I do understand that not everyone is as brave as Yosef Chiger to donate their kidney when they are alive, at the very least they should get an Israeli organ donor card and donate their organs when they no longer need them," Berman said.

At the moment, Berman is working to collect some \$15,000 to be able to bring Chiger and his family to Israel and pay him for lost wages.

HODS can be contacted through www.HODS.org



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