

'I'd Be An Organ Donor'

By James Martin - Friday 14th January 2011



Chief RABBI Lord Sacks has hit back at claims that he issued a ruling against Jews donating organs by insisting he would carry a donor card himself if patients' organs could be given within the boundaries of Jewish law.

Responding to a report in Wednesday's Guardian newspaper, which claimed he issued "an edict that organ donation and the carrying of donor cards are incompatible with Jewish law", Lord Sacks said: "This is not so. My position is that wherever we can save a life we should. That is a fundamental proposition of Judaism and it means that we favour organ donations."

He added that when Jews are able to donate organs within the strict parameters of religious law, "I will carry such a card myself".

He also pointed out that Judaism allows the donation of organs while people are alive, as long as this practice is not life threatening, and "fully supports the taking of additional organs" such as corneas when a donor is "clearly dead".

However, he acknowledged there was "sometimes conflict between the principles of honouring and saving a life".

In a ruling issued last week, Lord Sacks, along with the London Beth Din, stressed that despite there being "a view that brain stem death is an acceptable Halachic criterion in the determination of death the considered opinion of the London Beth Din is that in Halacha cardio respiratory death is definitive."

He concluded: "At this point, since the National Registry system is not set up to accommodate Halachic requirements, donor cards, even those purporting to be Halachic, are unacceptable."

Speaking on behalf of the Movement for Reform Judaism, Rabbi Jonathan Romain said: "Now there's the technology to confirm brain death, organs should speedily be removed to save lives."

In cases of premature death at least someone else's life can be saved."

Robert Berman, founder of the US-based Halachic Organ Donor Society (HODS), said: "I would have expected a more common sense approach like that of the Rabbinical Council of America, which acknowledges there are major halachic Poskim (authorities) on both sides of the debate."

He added: "The organ donor card from HODS allows people the option to indicate if they want to donate organs upon brain death or, alternatively, at irreversible cessation of cardiac activity."

Lord Sacks last week maintained that the Beth Din "has asked the National Organ Donor Registry to explore how it can facilitate an option for Jews to indicate their willingness for donation of their organs within Halacha.

"Those wishing to avail themselves of such service would then be able to register directly with the National Registry, with the clear provision a Halachic authority is contacted if and when donation is anticipated."

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