

# Failed Messiah

February 04, 2011

## Israeli Organ Donations Skyrocket



**Organ donations in Israel skyrocketed in January after the death of an Israeli soccer star prompted a religious debate on brain stem death.**

### [Israeli organ donations soar after soccer star dies](#)

By Maayan Lubell

**JERUSALEM (Reuters Life!) -** Organ donations in Israel rocketed in January after the death of an Israeli soccer star prompted a religious debate on brain death into the headlines.

Former Israel and Liverpool defender Avi Cohen sustained severe head injuries in a motorcycle crash in December. He was pronounced brain dead and put on a respirator.

Cohen had signed an organ donor card. But his family refused to give away his organs. Newspaper reports said rabbis had appealed to the family not to donate. Cohen's widow said the decision against donation was her own.

Some influential rabbis teach that taking organs from a person who is brain dead is tantamount to murder. "The number one reason people give for refusing to donate organs is religious. Jewish law is perceived, mistakenly, as being against it, when as you know in Judaism it depends which rabbi you ask," said Professor Jacob Lavee, head of Israel's Transplant Centre's Steering Committee.

In general, most ultra-orthodox rabbis are against organ donation while others adopt a more liberal interpretation of Jewish ritual law.

Rabbi Yossef Eliashiv, one of the most influential rabbis in Israel and regarded by Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox Jews as "the Sage of the Generation," has ruled that death can only be pronounced when the person's heart has stopped beating.

Other leading rabbis have come out against Eliashiv's stance, contesting his ruling on the moment of death.

Rabbi Reem Hacoen, head of Otniel Yeshiva in the occupied West Bank teaches that a person is obliged by Jewish law to sign a donor card.

"Organ donation is a great Mitzvah, or good deed," Hacoheh said. "If pronounced in keeping with Israeli law, brain death is in fact death."

In 2008 Israel passed a law which states the conditions for pronouncing a person brain dead. The bill was negotiated with leading rabbis who wanted to ensure doctors were not too quick to diagnose brain death in the interest of harvesting organs.

The law stipulates that only doctors authorized by a special committee, which includes rabbis as members, can determine brain death and only with the evidence of medical imaging machines.

According to Israel's Transplant Center only 10 percent of people in Israel carry donor cards. Israeli law states that family members have the last word and can veto a person's own will to donate his organs.

About half of the families of potential donors give their consent to recover organs, a rate Lavee said is low in relation to other Western countries.

Dvora Szerer, spokeswoman for the Transplant Center said transplants suddenly increased by 150 percent in the weeks after the highly emotional moment when Cohen's son announced on national television that his father had been pronounced brain dead "which is to say, he has died."

"Avi Cohen's death came up in every conversation with the donors' families," Szerer said. Awareness was raised and readiness to donate jumped.

(Editing by Douglas Hamilton and Paul Casciato)

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if a person's soul goes to heaven....wouldn't the g-d who taught us medicine be so pleased that someone could benefit so greatly from a much much much needed and appreciated organ?

Posted by: ruthie | [February 04, 2011 at 12:47 PM](#)



did anyone notice how the occupied west bank got mentioned in a story that has nothing to do with the article?

Posted by: marrtin nerl | [February 04, 2011 at 02:30 PM](#)



i don't understand this article. do they mean more organs have been actually donated or have more people signed up as donors? it seems as if more people have signed up, as that can be attributed to cohen's death( i guess those who registered told the registry they were doing it because of what happened to cohen). if 10 percent of the country is signed up thats about 700,000 people.what would be considered "skyrocketing"? another 7000(1 tenth of percent)? 70000 (1 percent)

shmarya correct me if i'm wrong but the article says the law allows family members to reject donating even if the donor signed up.so what good is having more people sign up if half of the families(according to the article) reject it afterwards? i guess half is better than none, but it mitigates the "skyrocketing. wouldn't it be better to get the law changed so that at least those who are convinced to donate will have their wishes accepted?

Posted by: marrtin nerl | [February 04, 2011 at 02:41 PM](#)



You see? The Rabbi's weren't trying to force their interpretation of Judaism on others and quash organ donation, they were using clever methods of social engineering to support organ donation!

Seriously though, it gives hope when it is shown that these people are their own worst enemies.

Posted by: Maverick | [February 04, 2011 at 03:49 PM](#)



*[Organ donations in Israel rocketed in January after the death of an Israeli soccer star prompted a religious debate on brain death]*

I am impressed that something so positive can come about because of a religious debate. I really didn't think that many people except for the frum followers really paid much attention to what the religious leaders said.

I guess the main thing is that some good came out from it.

Posted by: tzvi | [February 05, 2011 at 06:40 PM](#)



Shmarya,

When a man suffers brain stem cell "death" but is hooked up to a machine and breathing with a beating heart is there any rabbinical authority who would allow this man's wife to remarry?

Posted by: Maskil | [February 05, 2011 at 07:41 PM](#)



maskil..  
even i could answer that question..!

Posted by: ruthie | [February 05, 2011 at 10:57 PM](#)



The question was not rhetorical. I do not know the answer, and I'm ready to sign an organ donor card today, but I need to know the answer because there is an option about specifying the criteria for death (according to "which rabbi"). What is the answer?

Posted by: Maskil | [February 05, 2011 at 11:57 PM](#)