

Letters To The Editor

Featured News

Written by 5TJT Readers

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Rights vs. Obligations

Dear Editor, A new law in Israel gives priority on the transplant list to those people who already have an organ-donor card. More than 100 Israelis die every year due to the dearth of organ donors, and the new law is meant to save lives by motivating more people to get organ-donor cards. This is discrimination against people who do not have organ-donor cards. Dr. Leon Zacharowicz's claim in his February 11 letter to the editor, however, that the new Israeli law is specifically targeting Orthodox Jews is simply paranoid and not true; the law applies to all Israelis who don't have an organ-donor card for any reason at all.

Rabbi Avi Shafran picked up Dr. Zacharowicz's pennant and went on to mischaracterize my statements by saying (Letters, February 25) that I equated halachically observant Jews with people who are squeamish, selfish, or lazy. I did not equate them. Ironically, I compared them because they were different. The point I was making was that although they were indeed different (secular vs. Orthodox), the law applies to both of them equally. This law, as imperfect as laws usually are, also discriminates against a forgetful secular Israeli who forgot to register for a card as well as a person who couldn't get a card due to medical reasons.

I imagine that Rabbi Shafran would agree one may compare and contrast apples and oranges without necessarily equating them. And if Rabbi Shafran has an urge to label someone's position to be outside the pale, perhaps he should examine his own where he thinks a brain-dead patient is alive and yet he has no moral compunction asking a doctor to "murder" the donor in order to harvest his organs so he and his community may benefit from them.

Robby Berman
Founder and Director
Halachic Organ Donor Society

Calling A Spade A Spade

Dear Editor, I have followed the debate between Mr. Berman and other readers on the subject of organ donations and brain death.

The new Knesset legislation in Israel that gives preference on the organ waiting list to those with organ-donor cards was not based merely on medical ethics but also on civic ethics and the sense of social solidarity. It's true that a liberal society ought to be tolerant of minorities and even allow subversive voices to be expressed. But this is possible only when the society is strong enough to allow for it. Sadly, the organ shortage in Israel is so severe it dictates otherwise.

Furthermore, the new Israeli Respiratory Brain Death Act (2008) did try to meet the needs of the religious establishment and unfortunately, as a result, it has caused a substantial drop in the number of potential organ donors, exacerbating the situation in Israel and resulting in more unnecessary deaths.

Extreme conditions call for extreme measures, and the call for discriminating against those who oppose organ donation and who

abstain from their civic duty to contribute organs to society is well understood by the majority of Israelis. Indeed, the law on brain death in Israel was painstakingly crafted in full accordance with the halachic definitions of death as dictated by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, Rav Ovadiah Yosef, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, Rav Avraham Shapiro, and others. So those abstaining from signing Israeli organ-donor cards based on religious grounds are really a minority of a minority. It is they who choose to exclude themselves from society.

We, the majority, are not forcing them, the minority, to donate. We are not even preventing them from getting organs. We are just giving those that help their fellow citizen priority. It is unfathomable that those who don't donate organs are now complaining they don't receive as much as they would like to. The whole societal concept of organ donations is built on social solidarity. We, who live in Israel and not Long Island, cannot permit ourselves a liberal approach towards freeloaders.

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Stolen Siddur

Dear Editor, Regarding your uplifting moment described in "A Jerusalem Crowd," (Heard in the Bagel Store, February 25), by what right do you have to tell someone that he can steal a siddur from the Kotel? Was it yours to give? I think you should ask a shaila to your rabbi about what you can do for causing someone to sin. I think that you were "over lifnei iveir" at a minimum.

Larry Cohen

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