ORGANS AND HALACHA

Two years ago the chief rabbi was quoted in the JC as saying: “We feel the best way forward is that we should inform the community there are voices this way... there are voices that way... ultimately there’s a matter of individual conscience.” He made a brave and important statement for personal halachic autonomy about whether or not to be an organ donor.

As he said, this is an issue that mandates a serious halachic debate and for individuals to choose which of the valid halachic positions they wish to adopt. The lecture by Rabbi Avraham Steinberg is a major step forward in this debate (News, January 11).

What is not acceptable is for members of our community to ignore this issue and not give it the consideration it deserves. To save a life is the greatest act of altruism and the greatest mitzvah a human can perform.

There is room within the halachic spectrum, from the acceptance of brain stem death on the one hand to the insistence of cardio-respiratory cessation on the other, to accommodate every single Jewish person. The Halachic Organ Donation Society enables this. I urge every single Jewish adult to visit www.hods.org and make their halachic decision.

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I congratulate the Sephardi Beth Din on taking a lifesaving stance in favor of organ donation, in spite of pressures being put on them. As a Sephardi, as a rabbi, and as a neurologist, I am proud that almost all major Sephardic poskim have publicly stated that they agree with modern medicine that brain death is death and that Jews should donate organs to the general public, Jew and non-Jew alike.

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