

MAIS MITZVAH—AND ORGAN DONATION

GLENN RICHTER

Rob Berman is a man with a mission. It's a mission that potentially affects each one of us.

Berman is a former student activist for Soviet Jewry, journalist, and stand-up comic in Israel, a graduate of Yeshivat Hakotel and Yeshiva University with an MBA from Baruch College and an MPA from Harvard. He took on a new mission five years ago when he became aware that large segments of the Israeli and American Jewish communities are willing to accept organ transplants from others—but not donate their own organs. This reluctance, in a people otherwise known for its generosity, was based on superstition rather than Jewish religious law. In an attempt to dispel misinformation and encourage this vital practice Berman founded the Halachic Organ Donor Society, or HODS.

The non-profit group makes an organ donation card available that allows Jews to designate organs for transplant only—not for research. The cardholder also chooses whether organs can be recovered upon the cessation of heartbeat or upon the cessation of brainstem activity. Potential donors can check HODS' well-constructed website at www.hods.org and see prominent rabbis, such as Moshe Tendler and LSS founder Shlomo Riskin, who carry HODS organ donor cards.

Berman, who has spoken at LSS, told us he was proud of the fact that "when I started HODS five years ago there were only three Orthodox rabbis in the world with organ donor cards, and today as a result of our efforts there are 147 Orthodox rabbis with these cards. We have been responsible directly and indirectly for 38 organ transplants that we know of".

"I think the mood has changed in the Modern Orthodox community. In the haredi community it's hard to measure, but there definitely is more awareness as a result of our activities." Due to medical advances, Berman said, even persons over 90 have been able to donate livers after death.

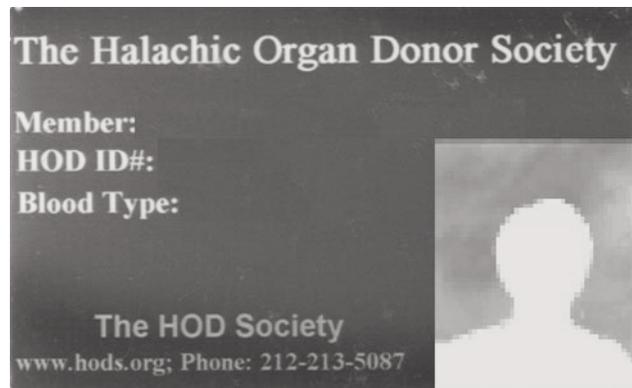
This past November, the New York Times covered a two-day symposium HODS organized at Einstein Medical College. Although a halachic debate remains open as to what is to be considered the moment of death, Berman told the Light, "If the person is brain-stem dead, then all organs are available for recovery. If you wait until the heart stops beating, then one can only recover the liver and kidneys, and you must act within 40 minutes."

Asked if we can specify to whom our organs can be donated, Berman said, "There is a directed donation intended to allow people to direct an organ to a family member or friend. But it is not meant to allow people of one religious group to discriminate against other religious groups."

It's said that one of the greatest mitzvot is "mais mitzvah," to assist in burial. After all, the deceased cannot repay the kindness. In a real sense, due to Rob Berman and the many rabbis who have joined him, we can—with a bit of pre-planning—fill the world after our passing with more good, and even live beyond own corporeal mortality.

The Halachic Organ Donor Society can be contacted at 49 West 45th Street, 10th floor, New York, NY 10036, (212) 213-5087; emergency number: 877-700-HODS. The Rabbinical Council of America offers a sample health care proxy on their site as well, which includes information on organ donation: <http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/hcp.pdf>.

- 1) C - Cantor Sherwood "Chaz" Goffin
 - 2) G - Florine Skolnick
 - 3) D - Joe Blank
 - 4) E - Marilyn Osgood
 - 5) H - Phil Landsberg
 - 6) F - Ruth Riemer
 - 7) A - Rabbi Shaul Robinson
 - 8) J - Susan Kalev
 - 9) I - Ruth Rosenberg
 - 10) B - Rabbi Shalom Morris
- FLORINE'S FROLICS
ANSWERS



To register for a HODS organ donor card go to www.hods.org.