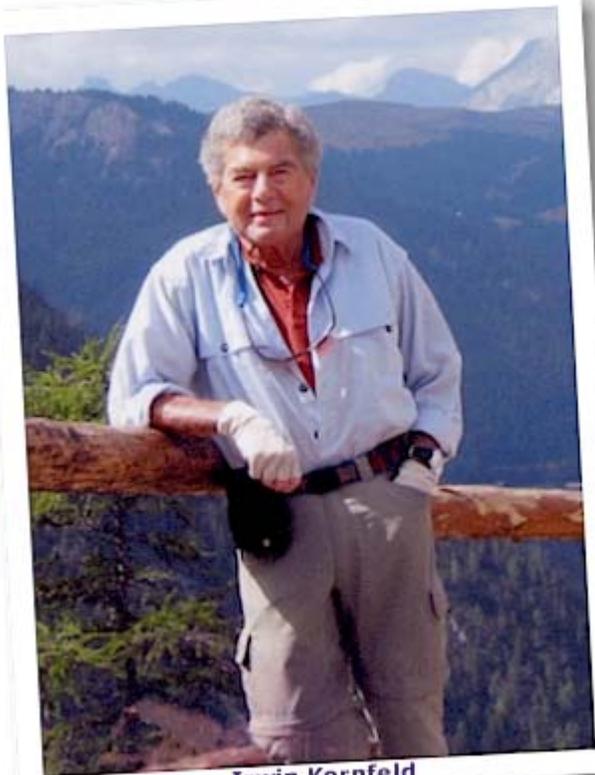


August 14, 2003

# **Pikuach Nefesh: Giving Back Life**

by Susan F. Sharf

**B**rad Kornfeld, a 36-year old Denver native, will be giving the gift of life back to the man who gave him it to him originally. Brad's father, Irwin, is currently on dialysis and in need of a new kidney. In simultaneous surgeries, Brad will be donating one of his kidneys to his father in a transplant scheduled for October.



Irwin Kornfeld

Although he quit smoking in 1978, Irwin Kornfeld was diagnosed with emphysema in 1985. In March 1993, he received a double lung transplant at Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, a facility specializing in transplant surgery. His physician, Dr. Joel Cooper, was the medical pioneer credited with performing the first successful single (1983) and double (1986) lung transplant in the world. After Irwin's lung transplant, he was able to continue with his active lifestyle uninterrupted for nine years, in the course of which he acquired a new daughter-in-law and four new grandchildren. During that time, Irwin took transplant anti-rejection medicines to help his body accept his new lungs. The medicines' high toxicity frequently causes kidney damage. Ironically, as the result of his successful lung transplant, Irwin found himself

facing kidney failure nearly a decade later.

The Kornfeld family is a tightly-knit unit. "We were close to begin with and this experience with my Dad has made us even closer," says Brad Kornfeld. When faced with their father's situation, Brad and his brother Rick got their families together to figure out the options. Dialysis was considered a poor long-term medical solution. The waiting period for a kidney from a deceased donor would be approximately 2-3 years for Irwin's blood type. Brad and Rick decided to have themselves tested to see if they would qualify for live donation. Brad matched.

"Before we were tested, Rick and I spent a long time talking about the long- and short-term effects of being a live donor. I was worried about Rick's family and he was worried about mine," Brad says. They met with Rabbi Stephen Foster to discuss the religious

considerations of their decision. *Pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) is one of the highest values of Judaism, and according to *halacha* (Jewish religious law) it is imperative to violate other commandments (such as keeping the Sabbath) in order to save a human life. As part of his decision process, Brad spoke to other live donors who had given organs to family members: "despite the fear and pain of surgery, the recovery period and the incredible inconvenience and disruption of their lives, not one of the donors that I spoke to regretted his decision. On the contrary, they were all very happy that they did it." Brad and his family considered what would happen if Irwin's transplant were unsuccessful. "We asked ourselves how we would feel if this didn't work...what if Dad doesn't live very long after the transplant? Will it all have been a waste? But evaluating our options and knowing that this would give him the best chance...knowing that I could do something to help Dad, how could I not?" Brad says passionately. "The decision came down to just that."

Brad and his family are very well-informed about his surgical risks as a donor. "When I tell people what I'm doing, their reactions range from 'I would do exactly the same thing' to 'are you crazy?' but I still feel very strongly about my choice." Brad will be in the hospital for five days with an estimated three week recovery. Brad and his wife Lisa have two small children, two-year-old Eliza and 7-week-old Andrew. They lead physically active lifestyles which include skiing, hiking, and traveling. "We know that this is going to be a major interruption in our lives. I won't even be able to pick up my daughter for a month and a half after the surgery," says Brad. "But the important thing to consider is that the long-term effects of this on my lifestyle are almost non-existent." His father's recovery time from the surgery will be about a month, "although my Dad has been known to cut every recovery time doctors have given him in half," laughs Brad.

The warmth in Brad's voice comes through as he talks about his relationship with his father. While he is an attorney by training, Brad has worked together with Irwin in their commercial real estate practice for the past ten years. "We have so much more than a parent-child relationship. We work together; we have a friendship; we have a partnership." Irwin is "thrilled and honored and touched and grateful" that Brad is going to donate his kidney to him, though it is an emotionally-loaded decision for both of them. "Naturally, my mother and father were concerned about me and how this would affect our family. They kept telling me that I shouldn't feel obligated to do this."

The Kornfelds will be flying to St. Louis for the surgery on October 14th, 2003. "We want other people to know how tremendous this can be," Brad says eagerly. "The waiting list for organ transplants is so



Brad and Irwin Kornfeld

long and you can literally change lives by donating an organ. Becoming an organ donor is one of the most important things you can do, both as a Jew and as a human being."

## **RESOURCES**

- [Donor Alliance](#) is a non-profit organization that facilitates the recovery and donation of organs and tissues in Colorado and Wyoming.
- You may join the [registry](#) of Coloradoans who have decided to save lives by becoming organ and tissue donors.
- The [Halachic Organ Donor Society](#) disseminates information regarding Halachic issues and Rabbinic opinions concerning organ donation. They have an extensive [library](#) of articles that inform the public as to some of the different medical issues and some of the general trends of rabbinic rulings involved with organ donation.



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