

Letters To The Editor

Halachic Organ Donation

Dear Editor, thank you for publishing the article ♦The Halachah of Kidneys♦ by Dr. Daniel Eisenberg in the July 31 issue. It was a very comprehensive presentation on the various halachic issues regarding live kidney donation, and hopefully will reassure Orthodox Jews of the permissibility of donating a kidney.

The other more complex and frequently misunderstood issue vis-♦-vis organ donation is the permissibility of donating organs after death. Many people don♦t realize that several major poskim, including Chief Rabbis Shlomo Amar, Ovadiah Yosef, and Mordechai Eliyahu, have ruled that brain-stem death is halachic death♦and that it would be permissible (and even a great mitzvah) to donate one♦s organs after death in order to save lives. Please check out the Halachic Organ Donor Society website, www.hods.org, which includes a complete discussion of this complicated subject, a list of rabbis who carry organ donor cards, and video testimonials from major poskim about the issue.

I♦m sure there were many Orthodox Jews who were repulsed after the story broke about the Brooklyn man who was accused of selling organs illegally. Without getting into the question of whether or not selling organs should be legalized, we should understand that there is a black market for organs because of the huge shortage of organs available for those who need them♦and that increasing the supply of cadaveric donations could eventually eliminate the illegal sale of such organs.

Let♦s hope that more Jews educate themselves about this important subject, so that we can help save lives ethically and legally.

Michael Feldstein
Member of the Board,
Halachic Organ Donor Society

The Kidney Matchmaker

Dear Editor, I am an Orthodox Jewish woman who donated a kidney to a stranger. Since my kidney donation, I have been wanting to do more. So, I now have a project to help others who are in need of a kidney. My brother donated a kidney, as well, to someone on my list of people in need of a kidney.

I am a kidney matchmaker. People in need of a kidney have contacted me from many parts of the USA, and internationally as well. A match I made in Israel was covered recently by the Jerusalem Post. My project is endorsed by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser.

I don♦t get paid for making kidney matches, and I don♦t charge a fee. And if anyone wants to donate a kidney, they have to do so altruistically, without getting paid. I haven♦t encountered any rabbis who are opposed to live kidney donation.

Anyone who donates a kidney has to be in good health. Before donating a kidney, one must go through medical testing. They are given medical tests that they might not otherwise take♦in fact, many lives of would-be donors have been saved through this medical testing. For example, a young person found out he had cancer through one of the medical tests to donate a kidney. He didn♦t know. He had no symptoms. The cancer was removed, and he was fine afterwards. Had he not offered to be tested to donate a kidney for someone else, the cancer could have spread. Many lives of people wanting to donate a kidney have been saved through their efforts to save another life!

A study published earlier this year suggests that kidney donors have no increased risk of kidney disease (end-stage renal disease) and they live just as long as the general population (♦Long-Term Consequences of Kidney Donation, ♦ New England Journal of Medicine, January 29, 2009). See my website, www.KidneyMitzvah.com, for links to other articles.

I am in touch with many Orthodox Jewish people who have donated a kidney, mostly to strangers, including Rabbi Steven Moskowitz, who teaches at Machon HaTorah. Many of the kidney donors are chassidim and have large families. And no one got paid for their kidney donation. All of us kidney donors are doing great, baruch Hashem.



None of us has any regrets, and some of us wish we could do it again.

Yes, it is impressive that many people in the Orthodox Jewish community have donated a kidney. But not enough people in general are donating a kidney. There are approximately 80,000 people waiting for a kidney, but fewer than 18,000 kidneys were transplanted last year. Thousands die each year waiting for a kidney, including people on my list. (A few others on my list got sicker on dialysis and are no longer eligible for a kidney transplant.)

It's so important that the public be educated about kidney donation, so more lives can be saved! A person can live just as well with one kidney as with two. Most people who are on dialysis because of failure of both kidneys when one goes, the other usually goes at the same time. Women can still have children after kidney donation. (I had made a kidney match in August 2007; the kidney donor in that match had a baby last month. I also know of other women who have had a baby after their kidney donation.) Kidney donation carries less risk than childbirth! How many people know that about 1 in 750 people are born with only one kidney? A great number of people who have donated a kidney have had people try to talk them out of it, thinking that the person will need both of their kidneys. Some of those people who try to talk others out of it can possibly be walking around with only one kidney and may never know it!

Most people don't know all these important facts about kidney donation. If people knew all the facts, more people would consider donating a kidney, and so many more lives could be saved.

Sincerely,
Chaya Lipschutz
Brooklyn
www.KidneyMitzvah.com

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