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Section: Halacha Category: Tshuvos

Rav Moshe Shternbuch: "Should I Give My Sister A Kidney?"

A young girl needed a kidney transplant and the doctors suggested a family member. Her single brother asked Rav Moshe Shternbuch (2:732) if he is obligated, forbidden, or allowed to donate his kidney to her and this is what he wrote.

On one hand it is a question of living a normal life with a normal diet or being beholden to a machine and not being able to eat normally. On the other hand says Rav Shternbuch, a person can survive on dialysis. It is not a question of life or death. Additionally there is no guarantee that the kidney will not be rejected.

Therefore he says the brother is not obligated to give his kidney to her. Even though there is a mitzva of tzedaka to family members, this doesn't apply to organs especially an important one like a kidney. He cites the Radvaz (3:627) who says that it is unfathomable to think one is required to give up an organ to save another Jew. He also brings the Maharil Diskin who says that although Safeik D'Oiraisa L'Chumra, that is only if it is guaranteed that your action will change the facts. Since here there is no guarantee of success, a person is not obligated to try.

Is it assur then to go through with this transplant? Since the Doctor's say that it is not life threatening to give up a kidney, even though it is painful for a short while and a possible problem in the future for the donator, nevertheless since you have a chance to save someone from a life of misery, not only is it permissible to do it but it is even considered a Midas Chasidus. Fortunate is the one who is up to the task! Certainly for a sister who is your own flesh and blood and it is hard to watch her live a life of pain and sorrow, being forced to remain unmarried. Fortunate is your lot in this world and the next!

Important Note: We try to convey the Tshuva to the best of our ability. We admit that our understanding may not be accurate. Please also understand that this Tshuva may not be the final word on this topic. One should consult a Rav before drawing any conclusions.