

Torah for Today! This week: Organ donation

Rabbi Ariel Abel looks at the possible introduction of opting-out from organ donation

BY RABBI ARIEL ABEL | November 2, 2017, 11:46 am |

Theresa May recently proposed the introduction of an opt-out clause for organ donation. What does the Torah say about this?

There are two halachic viewpoints at large in the rabbinic world. The Halachic Organ Donor Society (www.hods.org) based in the US promotes both viewpoints as valid halachic alternatives.

The more reactionary approach does not allow organ donation until the heart stops beating (bradychardia).

The opinion of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, many rabbis and Chief Rabbis worldwide is that brain stem death (BSD) is the point at which halachic death occurs, beyond which donations of essential organs can occur.

All viewpoints agree that live donations of organs such as one healthy kidney when the donor has two, are permissible.

Israel has legislated against organ tourism, searching for organs which have been unlawfully or immorally harvested from victims, such as political prisoners abroad.

Although in rabbinic Judaism one's first duty is to their own life, this merely prepares the individual to be of service to others.

On an individual level, the Talmud teaches that saving a life is saving a universe. On the communal level, there is also a duty to society, implicit to being a part of the Israelite nation.

From the point that the Israelites crossed the River Jordan, they became fully responsible for each other's fate.

Religious objections to organ donation after death include concerns about the body being desecrated before burial.

However, organs can be extracted cleanly to allow for *tahara* – Jewish last rites.

Furthermore, saving a life is more valuable than even that concern.

Why should organs that can save others be left to rot uselessly in the ground? How wonderful is it to know that others can live valuable years due to one selfless opt-in.

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