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NEW HALACHIC ORGAN DONOR SOCIETY INITIATES DIALOGUE ON BEREN CAMPUS

BY: ALICE ARONOV | OCTOBER 24, 2019

By Alice Aronov, Staff Writer

Sara Verschleisser and Talia Kupferman, co-presidents of the newly approved Halachic Organ Donor Society (HODS) chapter at Stern College for Women, have repeatedly encountered the question, “Don’t you need to be buried with all your organs?”

The answer is complex. While there are halachot regarding Jewish burial, Verschleisser explained that a halachic dialogue needs to be had. The HODS presidents bring up pikuach nefesh (the Jewish value of saving a life) in regards to Jews donating organs, and the halachic importance of the practice. They said that halachot “can be overridden in order to save a life. The real halachic discussion surrounding organ donation is not [surrounding] those halachot, but determining the halachic definition of death.”

The purpose of the HODS chapter on the Beren Campus is to raise awareness about the necessity of organ donation, and is sponsored by the Halachic Organ Donor Society organization, which has provided a fellowship to the club and its two presidents for the 2019-2020 academic year. According to the greater HODS organization, Verschleisser and Kupferman are expected to “organize lectures around the medical, ethical, and halachic issues surrounding organ donation, secure campus space for HODS educational brochures, coordinate campus participation in a Donor Registration Day, and recruit peer participants for the HODS annual 5K race.” HODS has “saved hundreds of lives, educated more than 50,000 Jews about organ donation and has recruited hundreds of rabbis to carry organ donor cards.” There is variety in their organ donation card options, allowing individuals to choose how and when they donate.

The club has been received with some apprehension because of the more traditional halachic views and leanings of some YU rabbis, like that of Rabbi Hershel Schachter, whose p’saks (rulings on Jewish law) forbid Jews from donating organs. Verschleisser and Kupferman had originally wished to call the club “Stern College for Organ Donation” but were dissuaded by the student government due to the possible issues it would cause with YU rabbinical authorities.

The Office of Student Life supports HODS bringing speakers to YU, but told the presidents, “In the past when HODS has come in, they have occasionally made [h]alachic statements that are not in line with Rav Schachter’s p’sak. It should be clear that if/when speakers come in, that we have roshei yeshiva who do not agree with all of their p’sak.”

A conversation is what Verschleisser and Kupferman are striving for, and they are finding others receptive to discussion. “People want to save lives,” Verschleisser said.

Students at SCW agreed with the club's presidents and are looking forward to the dialogue the club will initiate. Fruma Landa, SCW '21, told the Observer, "I think many people are not educated in the halachic discussion of organ donation so there are a lot of misconceptions about the role of organ donating in halacha. It is important to have a club on campus that is dedicated to teaching the many views and discussing these halachos in depth."

Photo: Right – Kupferman; Left – Verschleisser

Photo Source: HODS

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