

Organ Donor Shabbat: December 6, 2003



“It is not merely permissible for a Jew to bequeath his organs for transplantation following his death, it is a *mitzvah* for him to do so.” So wrote Rabbi David Golinkin, President of the Jewish Theological Seminary’s Israel College, Machon Schechter, and former chair of the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly in Israel.

Organ Donor *Shabbat* at AJ on December 6, 2003, is our way of participating in a national effort to highlight the importance of organ donations and encourage our members to register as organ donors. The program will begin with introductory remarks during the service, and continue after lunch with a panel discussion. Participating with me will be two members of the congregation who had organ donations, Dr. Seymour Piwoz, who had a heart transplant at Temple University Hospital eleven years ago, and Lowell Fishman who had a kidney transplant at Albert Einstein Medical Center earlier this year. In addition, Dr. Radi Zaki, Lowell’s surgeon, and head of the transplant team at Albert Einstein Medical Center will participate.

While once controversial, all branches of Judaism today recognize the importance of organ donations as a way of honoring and preserving life. Enormous advances have been made medically with increasingly successful, long-term outcomes.

The biggest problem today is the reluctance of individuals to be organ donors, or to agree to the donation of the organs of loved ones who have not indicated their preferences. For some of us, our inaction is simply that we do not want to think about our own deaths or the deaths of our loved ones. For others, organ donation seems to be a violation of the body of a loved one.

But in these matters, it must be the ability to save life that is paramount. As the *Talmud* says “Whoever saves one life, it is as if they saved the entire world (since in the beginning only one person was created by God).” This is something we must think about, overcome our reluctance, and act. People die waiting for life-saving organs. The organs that could save them are wasted. Only 40% of the organs that could be donated actually find their way to needy recipients! We must act, as individuals, to change that statistic. People are dying because of inaction.

Indicating a willingness to donate our organs in the event of death is most easily done by a designation on our driver’s license, as I have done. It can also be done by signing and carrying organ donation cards available from many sources. I have copies of a Rabbinical Assembly folder containing a donor card. I would be happy to send you one, and more will be available on December 6, 2003.

In making this decision, we need to be sure to make our decision clear to our next of kin so they know how to follow our wishes. If we have to make the decision for someone who never indicated their preference, we should assume that they would want to be a rescuer even after death, and would want to do the right and noble thing.

I hope you will join me and our guests on December 6, 2003, to explore this need and opportunity further. The gift of life is precious. Into our hands has been given new opportunities, miraculous opportunities, to help, to rescue, to save others. May we have the compassion, sensitivity, love and faith to make the provisions and the decisions so that others might live because of us.

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