



Give thanks. Give life.

National Donor Sabbath



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Judaism and Organ Donation

Contrary to common myth, all Jewish denominations encourage organ and tissue donation. The mitzvah of saving a life, pikuach nefesh, is considered one of Judaism's highest values (Hadassah - Pikuah Nefesh)

In principle, Judaism supports and encourages organ donation in order to save lives. This can sometimes override the strong objections to any unnecessary interference with the body after death, and the requirement for immediate burial of the complete body.

It is understandable that there will be worries about organ donation. At a time of stress and grief, linked to sudden unexpected illness and death, reaching a decision about donation can be difficult for a family. It is at this time that halachic guidance is so important.

Judaism insists that no organ may be removed from a donor until death. Judaism insists that honor and respect are due to the dead (kavod hamet). After donation, the avoidance of unnecessary further interference with the body, and the need for immediate interment, are again of prime concern.

"One who saves a single life - it is as if he has saved an entire world."

Pirke D'Rav Eliezer, chapter 48

Scriptural References that may be useful in presenting the Charitable Gift of Organ Donation

Old Testament	
Genesis 2:20-30	The first transplant: A rib taken from Adam to give life to Eve
Leviticus 1:7	"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."
Deuteronomy 30:15-20	"Choose life so that you and your descendants may live."
Psalms 41	Images of a healing Lord
Psalms 100	Psalms of praise and thanksgiving
Psalms 107	"consider the steadfast love of the Lord."
Psalms 111	"I give thanks to the Lord."
Psalms 113	Praises to the Lord
Psalms 116	"O Lord, I pray, save my life!"
Psalms 145	"The Lord is gracious and merciful."
Psalms 147	"Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving."
Ecclesiastes 3:1-17	"For everything there is a season..."
Isaiah 35:1-6	"Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees." "...the eyes of the blind shall be opened..."
Isaiah 40:31	"but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength...they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."
Ezekiel 37	The valley of dry bones: "These bones shall live."



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Sample Bulletin Insert

Pikkuah Nefesh – the saving of a human life – is one of the most urgent Mitzvah in Judaism, and religious leaders agree that organ donation and the saving of a life is a Mitzvah that can be fulfilled after death. At the time of a person's death, a medical evaluation will determine suitable organs and tissues for transplant. You can sign-up to save lives as an Organ Donor on your New Mexico driver's license and talk to your family about your decision to donate LIFE.

Organ donation is a gift of life – Signing up to be an organ donor fulfills the positive Mitzvah of the obligation to **"save people's lives" Pikkuah Nefesh**. Talk to your family about the benefit of saving lives through organ donation.

Sample Newsletter Article

Saving a Life through Organ Donation and Transplantation

Judaism teaches that saving a human life takes precedence over maintaining the sanctity of the human body. "If one is in the position to donate an organ to save another's life, it's obligatory to do so, even if the donor or their family never knows who the beneficiary will be. The basic principle of Jewish ethics – 'the infinite worth of the human being' – also includes donation of corneas, since eyesight restoration is considered a life-saving operation" according to Rabbi Dr. Moses Tendler, Professor of Talmud and Biology at Yeshiva University and Chairman of the Bio-ethics Commission of the Rabbinical Council of America. "It is given that the donor must be brain dead in accordance with the standards set by the Harvard University criteria and the President's Commission on brain death" he adds.

Organ donation is actually a "moral obligation". It is the only "mitzvah" an individual can perform after death. The duty of saving an endangered life (*pikkuah nefesh*) suspends the operation of all the commandments in the Torah, with the exception of three prohibitions: no man is to save his life at the price of murder, adultery or idolatry. The sages of the Talmud interpret the words "he shall live by them," in Leviticus 18:5, to mean that the *mitzvah*, the divine commands, are to be a means of life and not of death.

Judaism places primacy on saving and enhancing life which organ donation and transplantation do. The responsibility and obligation to save life supercedes other considerations including desecration of the body after death (body is treated with utmost respect), derivation of benefit from the corpse (organs recovered that will save another's life), and lack of a full burial for the deceased (transplanted organs will be buried with the body). As long as one life is not destroyed to save another and the life-saving methods are within the context of moral and ethical responsibility, God's will is done.

According to Jewish law, transplantation is allowed, and even encouraged, if it does not hasten death, if it is performed with respect for the body, and if body parts not used for transplantation are buried. The highest human value in Jewish philosophy is to emulate God, which can be done through acts of love, compassion, and concern, including organ donation and transplantation.

For more information visit www.DonateLifeNM.org or call New Mexico Donor Services at 1-800-843-7672.



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THIS PASSOVER ASK...

The Four Questions on Organ and Tissue Donation: A Jewish Response

Q: WHAT IS ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION?

A: It is a unique opportunity to participate in the *mitzvah* of *pikuah nefesh*, on the saving of life. Each year, tens of thousands of people receive transplants. You probably already know somebody who has benefited from a transplant. In fact, you or someone close to you may need a transplant someday, because organ failure can happen to anyone at any age.

Q: WHAT IS THE MYTH ABOUT JEWISH VIEWS ON ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION AND WHAT DOES JUDAISM REALLY SAY?

A: Contrary to the myth, all Jewish denominations encourage organ and tissue donation. The major movements within Judaism have all drafted official responses advocating donations. In 1991, the Rabbinical Council, affiliated with Orthodox Judaism, declared, "When human life can be saved, it must be saved.... The *halakhah* (Jewish law) therefore looks with great favor on those who facilitate the procurement of life-saving organ donations."

Q: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO DONATE ORGANS AND TISSUES?

A: Organ and tissue transplantation is one of our era's medical triumphs. It can dramatically save or improve the lives of those suffering from organ failure or those suffering from eye and tissue disease or trauma-related defects. The need for transplants overwhelms the availability. Over 97,000 Americans are awaiting organ transplants today. Typically, 17 such patients die each day.

Q: HOW DOES ONE BECOME A DONOR?

A: Becoming a donor is an important decision. Talk to your family and friends about why you are thinking about becoming a donor. Let them express how they feel about organ and tissue donation. Keep in mind:

- Becoming a donor will not interfere with your health care—you will receive the same care that a non-donor receives.
- The body of an organ donor or tissue donor is always treated with care and respect.
- There is no charge to the donor or his/her family. The procurement agency pays the costs associated with recovery of organs and tissues.
- The donation of organs and tissues is often comforting to family members—a symbolic way for life to continue.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Sign-up to be a donor on your New Mexico driver's license / ID card or sign an Organ Donor card to signify your commitment to renewing the life and health of others in need.



Visit www.DonateLifeNM.org or www.Hadassah.org Pikuah Nefesh – To Save a Life

