

“You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.”

– Leviticus 19:16

“Anyone who is able to save a life, but fails to do so, violates this mitzvah.”

– Maimonides

“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, in order to save one life, or several lives.”

– Rabbi David Golinkin, *Law Committee Chairman, Rabbinical Assembly of Israel; Dean, Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem*

“The overriding principles of honoring the dead (כבוד המת) and saving lives (פיקוח נפש) work in tandem. That is, saving a person’s life is so sacred a value in Judaism that if a person’s organ can be used to save someone else’s life, it is actually an honor to the deceased.”

– Rabbi Elliot Dorff, *Rector, University of Judaism*



Rabbinical Assembly כנסת הרבנים
3080 Broadway New York, NY 10027
(ph) 212.280.6000 (fx) 212.749.9166
info@rabbinicalassembly.org www.rabbinicalassembly.org

MORE INFORMATION TO HELP YOU DECIDE

- The body of an organ and/or tissue donor is always treated with care and respect.
- There is no charge to the donor or to his or her family for donation.
- Organ and tissue donation will not delay funeral arrangements.
- Studies show that organ donation helps to shorten the time needed by members of a bereaved family to recover from their loss.
- The traditional Jewish belief in resurrection in no way precludes organ donation.

The Rabbinical Assembly is the international association of Conservative rabbis. Since its founding in 1901, the Assembly has been a creative force shaping the ideology, programs, and practices of the Conservative movement, and is committed to building and strengthening the totality of Jewish life. The Assembly publishes learned texts, prayerbooks, and works of Jewish interest; and it administers the work of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards for the Conservative movement.



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ORGAN & Tissue Donation TISSUE DONATION

“There is no greater כבוד המת (honor to the deceased) than to bring healing to the living.”

– Rabbi Isaac Klein, ז”ל

*A Project of the Rabbinical Assembly
and the United Synagogue of
Conservative Judaism*

*Developed by the Committee on
Jewish Law and Standards of the
Rabbinical Assembly*

INTRODUCTION

The inestimable value of human life is a cardinal principle of Jewish Law. This value is expressed through the religious obligation for self-preservation, as well as the duty to save the life of one's fellow human being, if he or she is in mortal danger. This religious obligation is a mitzvah of such a high order that it takes precedence over virtually all other religious duties with which it may conflict: the sick must eat on Yom Kippur; the injured are treated on the Sabbath; we postpone the circumcision of weakened infants beyond the covenantally mandated eighth day, etc.

Since the onset of the modern era of organ transplantation in the 1950s, leading rabbinic authorities from throughout the religious spectrum have seen in this new technology a new and effective means of fulfilling a divine mandate to save life – an obligation first expressed in the Torah itself: "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor." Organ donation is a new means to fulfill an ancient, eternal religious duty: a mitzvah of the highest order.

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has affirmed this principle in unambiguous terms, and celebrates the leadership and insight of other movements and authorities who have shared the task of educating the Jewish community about this mitzvah: "The preservation of human life is obligatory, not optional. Since all conflicting halakhic duties are suspended and human lives are at stake... consent must be granted for post-mortem organ donation when requested by doctors and hospitals for use in life-saving transplantation procedures... This applies to the individual in anticipation of his or her own death, as well as to health care proxies or next of kin whenever they are legally empowered to make such decisions on behalf of the deceased... By so doing, he or she renders only profound and genuine honor to the deceased." – *Synopsis of Teshuvah on Organ Donation*, by Rabbi Joseph H. Prouser

THE NEED

- Over 80,000 men, women and children currently await life-saving transplants.
- Many thousands more need donated tissues.
- Every 13 minutes a new name is added to the list.
- An average of 17 people die each day from the lack of available organs for transplant.

THE SUCCESS

- Most organ transplants are very successful, either saving lives or greatly improving the quality of life for the recipients.
- One year success rates range from 70% for livers and lungs, to over 90% for kidneys.
- Many of these recipients have had functioning transplants for over 25 years.
- Success rates continually improve as better methods to control rejection are identified.

THE PROCESS

1. Collect information about donation and transplantation.
2. Familiarize yourself with the Jewish obligation to preserve life.
3. Talk to your family about your decision.
4. Sign the attached donor card, in the presence of two witnesses.
5. Carry the signed card in your purse or wallet, with your identification. Include your donor status in any more comprehensive advance medical directives.

CJLS

The Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has ruled that one is obligated to permit post-mortem transplantation of his or her organs in life-saving medical procedures and that withholding consent for such organ donation is contrary to Jewish Law.

DONOR CARD

Please detach and give this portion of the card to your family. You may wish to provide copies of this document to various family members.

This is to inform you that I want to be an organ and tissue donor if the occasion ever arises. Please see that my wishes are carried out by informing attending medical personnel that I am a donor. In so doing, you will be acting as my partner and agent in the mitzvah of פיקוח נפש, saving lives.

In keeping with the Jewish belief that the human body is God's creation, and is thus to be accorded sanctity even after death, please see that all appropriate steps are taken on my behalf to maintain כבוד המת, honor to the deceased. As soon as needed organs or tissues are retrieved in accordance with my instructions, see that the rest of my remains are buried in a Jewish cemetery, in accordance with Jewish law and custom. Thank you.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

In keeping with the moral and religious teaching of Jewish law, and in an effort to help others, I hereby make this anatomical gift, if medically acceptable, to take effect upon my death. FOR PURPOSES OF TRANSPLANTATION ONLY, I donate:

___ a) Any needed organs or tissues
___ b) Only the following organs or tissues: (please specify which organs or tissues): _____

Limitations or special wishes, if any: _____

Signature of donor: _____

Birthdate: _____

City & State where signed: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____

Witness: _____

Must be signed by donor and two witnesses in the presence of each other.