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Cohen's widow: Organ donation my decision, not extremists'

By JONAH MANDEL
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Soccer star's wife insists pressure from religious figures not responsible for her going against donor card.

The widow of recently deceased soccer star Avichay Cohen defended on Sunday her decision to not donate his organs despite his carrying a donor card, rejecting reports that it was a result of pressure applied by extreme religious figures.

"The decision was mine," Dorit Cohen told Army Radio on Sunday. "I wanted Avichay whole."

Cohen lay in a coma for nine days following a road accident, and a day before his passing away on Wednesday, was pronounced brain dead. Having signed an ADI organ donation card, his family began authorizing the removal of organs to save other lives. An official in the Chief Rabbinate confirmed that Chief Sephardi Rabbi Shlomo Amar told the family that in principle, Halacha permits removing organs for donations in cases such as these, without ruling on this specific case.

According to reports, ultra- Orthodox men – perhaps affiliated with certain Breslav courts in Jerusalem – talked the family out of its intention to remove his organs while his heart was still beating, which they said would be a grave sin.

"We still had hope," Dorit Cohen, who was still sitting shiva, the seven-day mourning period, told the radio station.

"Avichay was a strong, healthy man, and I knew that the moment Avichay would emerge from his coma he'd fight... we believed that Avichay would wake up and overcome the severe injury," she said.

"The rabbis didn't pressure me, I was detached from the whole issue, in my own world, my own struggle, in my faith, supported by everyone," Cohen said on Sunday. "The decision was mine... I don't wish upon anyone to be forced to decide whether to donate the organs of the person you love most."

Cohen was not unaware of the fact that she was going against her late husband's own wishes that his organs might be used to save others people's lives.

"If he could, Avichay would have said 'do it,'" she said, but defended her decision and noted the life-saving deeds the soccer star had done before, and even after his death.

"I don't think anyone can judge me – Avi had done so much over the years to help people. Even in his death people will become more aware of the proper use of helmets, and how to drive," she said.

Meanwhile, MK Ilan Gilon (Meretz) is promoting legislation to give a signed ADI card the legal status of a will, that cannot be changed after the card carrier's death, and solve the dilemma that families such as Cohen's might face in a very difficult time.

"This will protect the families from all kinds of rabbis who exploit people in distress, by turning the signature into an irreversible fact," he said on Sunday, despite Cohen's denial that such was the case in her decision.

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