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[Home](#) > Moral Consistency

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(Rabbi) Dr. Eugene Korn

Kudos to Rabbi Dov Linzer for his public statement that insisting on the cardio-respiratory definition of death while permitting the acceptance of a vital organ is “morally untenable” (“Pushback From Some Orthodox Rabbis On Brain-Death Ruling,” Jan. 14). He is undoubtedly correct.

The position that a Jew is prohibited from donating a heart, but may receive one, violates the most fundamental axiom of ethical reasoning, and as such cannot be justified morally.

The test of intellectual integrity is the willingness to pay the price for one’s principles. Both intellectual and moral integrity demand that if someone believes that donating a heart of a brain-dead person constitutes murder, then he is obligated to deny himself the benefit of receiving such a heart. If he does accept it or even facilitate others accepting it, he is an accessory to murder according to his own principles. I am not qualified to judge whether rejecting brain death as halachic death is correct scientifically, but I do know that if some rabbis insist on the cardio-respiratory standard, moral consistency dictates that each one of those rabbis take a solemn oath that he will never agree to receive a vital organ — even if it means saving his own life, or that of his loved ones.

The primary problems with the position that one may not be a donor but may be a recipient are not, as some believe, that it will be damaging to Jews and Israel (which it will be) and it will be seen by others as moral hypocrisy (which it is). The fundamental problem is that it is morally wrong in and of itself, even when others are not judging us. And if acted upon, this moral wrong will surely prevent saving many precious lives.

The Torah demands that we do both what is halachically correct and “what is right and good in the eyes of the Lord.” If so, refusing to donate a vital organ while accepting one cannot be what the Torah had in mind.

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