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Organ Donation, a Lifesaving Mitzvah: Beth Jacob Member Needs a Kidney

Former Atlantan David Koster donated one of his kidneys in 2003 to save the life of another Jewish person. Since then, he has been on a mission to encourage others to consider this life-saving option. He will speak in Atlanta on Sunday, Jan. 30, on behalf of Toco Hills resident Marvin Carus, a member of Congregation Beth Jacob, who needs a kidney. Koster will be joined by Torah Day School of Atlanta teacher Rabbi Eliyahu Tendler, a kidney recipient, and Septima Hardy, a kidney donor who is the kidney donor outreach coordinator at Piedmont Hospital.

Koster, now of Brooklyn, N.Y., is passionate about his cause. He said he urges anyone who is in need of a kidney, who is on dialysis, who knows of anyone in those situations, or who has considered donating a kidney to attend one of his talks. They will be held at 11 a.m. at the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta in Dunwoody and at 7:30 p.m. at Congregation Beth Jacob in Toco Hills.

Carus, a 62-year-old optometrist and father of four, has been on dialysis three times a week for a year. He is Blood Type O. People in good health between the ages of 18 and 70 are eligible to be considered as a kidney donor.

Doctors attest to the benefits and safety of donating a kidney, and rabbis have addressed the issue of organ donation in relation to *Halacha* (Jewish law).

"Kidney donation is a relatively safe operation and many donors will never feel the loss of their second kidney. So giving up a kidney causes no disadvantage to your long-term health. In fact, studies have shown that kidney donors actually live longer than the general population because donors come from a pool of people in good health," said Dr. Michael Edye, adjunct associate professor of surgery at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York.

According to the Halachic Organ Donor Society website, www.hods.org, "Research shows that people who receive a kidney transplant live for approximately 14 more years after the transplant. Had they been exclusively on dialysis, however, their life expectancy would have been only 4.8 more years for people 60-64 years-old."

Writing on www.About.com – Judaism, Rabbi Shraga Simmons offered these explanations: "With few exceptions, the obligation to preserve human life, *pikuah nefesh*, is an overriding principle of Jewish law. This would support the idea of organ donation.

"At the same time, Jewish law prohibits desecration of a dead body since it once housed the holy soul [and] is to be treated with the utmost respect. Every part of the body must be buried. How do we resolve these two principles?

"Organ donation is permitted in the case when an organ is needed for a specific, immediate transplant. In such a case, it is a great mitzvah for a Jew to donate organs to save another person's life. Organ donation is not necessarily limited to dead people: Someone who can afford to spare a kidney, for example, may donate one to someone in need.

"Yet in consideration of the prohibition against desecrating the body, it is forbidden to simply donate to an "organ bank" where there is no specific, immediate recipient. Furthermore, for general medical research or for students to practice in medical school, a Jew is not permitted to donate organs."

Rabbi Simmons recommends, however, that a potential donor or donor's family "consult with a rabbi well-versed in Talmud and Jewish law."

For additional information regarding the halachic view of organ donation, Rabbi Simmons suggests contacting the Institute for Jewish

Medical Ethics in San Francisco, (800) 258-4427
begin_of_the_skype_highlighting, or reading *Judaism and Healing* by
Rabbi J. David Bleich (Ktav Publishing, 1981).

David Koster and Rabbi Tendler will be available on a limited
basis for consultations with dialysis patients. For information, call (917)
753-4131 or email kidneygiver@aol.com

The MJCCA is located at 5342 Tilly Mill Road in Dunwoody, Ga.,
30338, (678) 812-4000. Beth Jacob is located at 1855 LaVista Road,
Atlanta, Ga. 30329, (404) 633-0551.

For additional information about kidney donation, visit
www.kidney.org (National Kidney Foundation).

By FRAN MEMBERG for AtlantaJewishNews.com

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