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Praise to HODS

November 25, 2009 by [Shimshonit](#)

Years ago, while living in the US, flyers from the [Halachic Organ Donor Society](#) appeared at our shul giving information and a pitch for traditional Jews to consider donating organs.

Many traditional Jews (and not-so-traditional ones) believe that because Judaism embraces the value of *kavod ha'adam* (respect for the human body), does not generally support the performance of autopsies, and has very strict guidelines for burial, that organ donation must be out of the question. This is not true.

The HODS website includes the transcript of an [interview with Rav Yehudah Meshi-Zahav](#), founder of [ZAKA](#), a volunteer organization whose members go to scenes of murders, road accidents, suicides, and terror attacks to ensure that every casualty is as intact as possible in preparation for burial. (This sometimes involves locating body parts that have been dislocated, or mopping up blood. Rarely a pretty task.) In the interview, Rav Meshi-Zahav states that “A person who was killed, or deceased, needs to be brought complete to burial. This is the correct tradition. One the other hand, any chance you have to save a life, this mitzvah is no less important than the mitzvah of respecting the dead. If a person can do *chessed* [donate organs]...and it's the same *chessed*, no less than what we do with the dead...the same *chessed*, perhaps the last one a person can do after he enters the other world...is saving another person's life. There is no mitzvah greater than that! ...The phrase, “One who saves one life, is as if he saved the world” exists in organ donation, as well...Because saving another person's life is beyond the elevation of one's soul. After the person who donated dies, the people [who received the organs] continue to do great things.”

Not all rabbis are in agreement about how to define death; some accept brain death, others do not. HODS acknowledges that there are different ways halachic authorities rule on this issue, and their donor card allows donors to specify the definition of death for the purposes of donation. The HODS website has an entire [page dedicated to videos](#) of rabbis around the world and their positions on organ donation, as well as personal testimonials.

Uninformed people may believe that they cannot be donors if they are sick or elderly. This is not necessarily the case. The website has a [page](#) which includes a diagram of all of the organs, tissues, and bone that can be donated, and includes two pages of FAQs for more information ([here](#) and [here](#)).

I am on HODS's email list, and occasionally receive emails with news about the organization, updates, and success stories. In the most recent email, I read that a 24-year-old expectant father in Teaneck, NJ, recently received a liver and is doing well; Rabbi Adin Steinzaltz has recently accepted brain death and supports organ donation; the HODS website is now readable in Spanish and German; and November is Organ Donor Sabbath Month, in which congregations are encouraged to educate themselves about organ donation, conduct donor drives, discuss organ donation as families, and invite speakers (experts, donor and recipient families) to address the congregation.

HODS encourages Jews to become donors by [signing up for donor cards](#), and [accepts donations](#) for their very worthy work, which has saved over 100 Jewish and non-Jewish lives.

Just think—a mitzvah one can perform when one can no longer perform mitzvot.



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2 Responses

1. on [November 25, 2009 at 1:39 pm](#) [Kate](#)

Thanks for the reminder to sign up. My US driver's license has always indicated that I wanted to be an organ donor, but I need to do the HODS one in Israel...and so my husband has decided to do it as well!



2. on [November 25, 2009 at 10:02 pm](#) [ilanadavita](#)

I always carry a donor card; this is how we do it here.

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