

Why I Support Halachic Organ Donation

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As a physician, it is clear to me people should be organ donors. I know there is a shortage of organs and thousands of people die waiting to get an organ that never gets donated. But I did not know Jews have one of the lowest organ donor rates in the Western world. All Jews and, surprisingly, even secular Jews, who have tattoos, drive on Shabbat, and eat cheeseburgers, refuse to donate organs because they believe it is against halacha. Why this and not that? Who knows? Therefore I joined the board of a very small but focused organization called the Halachic Organ Donor Society, HODS. It has single-handedly raised awareness about halachic and rabbinic support for organ donation. It has saved hundreds of lives in many countries by encouraging organ donation from Jews to the general public. It even offers a qualified posek to offer guidance to families during a difficult and emotional stressful period. HODS literature and educational videos have been translated into many languages to assist other countries in educating their citizens about the science of organ donation and transplantation.



Author Dr. Moshe Wertenteil Crosses the Finish Line.

As an observant Orthodox Jew and a physician, it is my responsibility to be an active advocate for organ donation. I belong to a growing group, the largest group in the world, Orthodox Physicians, who publicly support organ donation. We have worked to inform others about HODS; we recruit fellow orthodox physicians to obtain organ donor cards; and we raise funds for HODS to publish educational literature and to publish advertisements displaying orthodox rabbis with organ donor cards.

It is en vogue for philanthropists of large and small sums to evaluate the impact of their monetary donations to the goal they are trying to achieve. For example, how unique is this project I'm investing in? Is anyone else doing it? What kind of bang am I getting for my buck? When HODS started out more than a decade ago only two Orthodox rabbis had organ donor cards, only 3% of Israelis had organ donor cards and 120 Israelis died every year 'on the list.' Now 15% of Israelis and 238 rabbis have organ donor cards, and only 80 Israelis die on the list. Being involved in helping an organization save lives is satisfying in a huge way for me and my family.

When Jews take organs but refuse to donate them, it is a chillul Hashem and we should all be mindful the medical community is aware of this trend. In addition to saving lives, HODS enables kiddush Hashem every time a Jew signs an organ donor card and he or she donates organs.

I have seen first-hand how organ donation affects both the receiver and the donor family. The impact cannot be underestimated or overstated. Though no one should be in a situation where they can serve as a donor, I hope all would consent to donate their organs should the situation arise.

Three years ago HODS held its first 5K run. After seeing the fun video and lively pictures of the event, my family and I decided to participate in the second annual 5K run held in March 2014. Our team, which included my sister and her husband, Teena and Stu Rubinfeld from Jamaica Estates, NY, raised the most money. This coming March 1, 2015 in Central Park, the 4th annual 5K run will take place. Our team is back with the addition of Dahlia Goldbrenner of Riverdale, NY and hoping to break our record from last year. Other prizes are for the person who brings in the most sponsorship dollars wins a free round trip ticket to Israel and anyone who raises more than \$1,000 wins an iPhone. The fastest male and female runner also gets an iPhone. Please consider running, donating or getting involved. Please visit www.HODS.org. The website is an excellent resource for those who want to learn about organ donation in terms of the science and the sources in the halachic literature.

By Moshe Wertenteil



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