

## News Brief

# Russian chief rabbi slams court ruling on organ harvesting by default

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(JTA) — Berel Lazar, a chief rabbi of Russia, protested a recent high court ruling that by default allows medical authorities to harvest organs from cadavers.

The March 9 ruling by Russia’s Constitutional Court was on a motion by relatives who opposed the harvesting without notice of organs from the bodies of their loved ones, the news site [www.jewish.ru](http://www.jewish.ru) last week [reported](#). The ruling states that relatives opposed to this custom must alert medical authorities ahead of their loved ones’ demise of their objection to the practice. In all other cases, cadavers are to be harvested for organs immediately after death.

“We understand the need for organs for transplants,” Lazar wrote in a March 11 [statement](#) explaining his unusually strong-worded objection to the ruling. “But it is unthinkable to take them from a person against the will of their family and loved ones!” Separately, Christian faith leaders also protested the ruling.

Lazar added he hoped that “ultimately, the government will demonstrate necessary flexibility and respect the rights of the believers.”

The harvesting of organs from cadavers is a sensitive issue in Judaism. While generally permitted by Halakha, Jewish Orthodox religious law, under the principle of the sanctity of life and the need to save it when possible, is it subject to strict limitation compliant with principles of the integrity of bodies at burial.

In his statement, Lazar stressed his support for transplants authorized by relatives or prior to death. But, to illustrate the issue’s sensitivity, he also wrote that, in Israel, burial societies treating terrorist victims go to the trouble of “even collecting blood that was shed on the ground” for burial.

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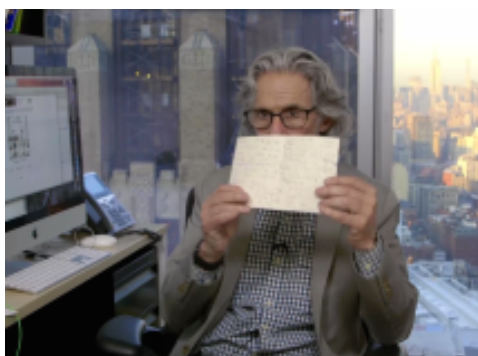
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