

## Donor Sabbath Sample Newsletter Article - Judaism

### **Saving a Life through Organ Donation and Transplantation**

National Donor Sabbath is observed annually on Friday through Sunday two weekends before Thanksgiving (November 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016). During this three-day observance, faith leaders, donor families, transplant recipients, and donation and transplantation professionals join forces to increase awareness of the need for lifesaving organ, tissue, and eye donation.

Judaism teaches that saving a human life takes precedence over maintaining the sanctity of the human body. "If one is in the position to donate an organ to save another's life, it's obligatory to do so, even if the donor or their family never knows who the beneficiary will be. The basic principle of Jewish ethics – 'the infinite worth of the human being' – also includes donation of corneas, since eyesight restoration is considered a life-saving operation" according to Rabbi Dr. Moses Tendler, Professor of Talmud and Biology at Yeshiva University and Chairman of the Bio-ethics Commission of the Rabbinical Council of America. "It is given that the donor must be brain dead in accordance with the standards set by the Harvard University criteria and the President's Commission on brain death" he adds.

Organ donation is actually a "moral obligation". It is the only "mitzvah" an individual can perform after death. The duty of saving an endangered life (*pikkuah nefesh*) suspends the operation of all the commandments in the Torah, with the exception of three prohibitions: no man is to save his life at the price of murder, adultery or idolatry. The sages of the Talmud interpret the words "he shall live by them," in Leviticus 18:5, to mean that the *mitzvah*, the divine commands, are to be a means of life and not of death.

Judaism places primacy on saving and enhancing life which organ donation and transplantation do. The responsibility and obligation to save life supersedes other considerations including desecration of the body after death (body is treated with utmost respect), derivation of benefit from the corpse (organs recovered that will save another's life), and lack of a full burial for the deceased (transplanted organs will be buried with the body). As long as one life is not destroyed to save another and the lifesaving methods are within the context of moral and ethical responsibility, God's will is done.

According to Jewish law, transplantation is allowed, and even encouraged, if it does not hasten death, if it is performed with respect for the body, and if body parts not used for transplantation are buried. The highest human value in Jewish philosophy is to emulate God, which can be done through acts of love, compassion, and concern, including organ donation and transplantation.

Show compassion and love to your brothers and sisters by joining the New York State Donate Life Organ and Tissue Donor Registry. You can find out more information about the lifesaving gifts passed to others through organ, eye and tissue donation by visiting [www.donatelifenewyork.com](http://www.donatelifenewyork.com).