

# Rabbi Sharff's Reflections



In the United States we like to designate every month with particular meaning. February is Black History Month. September is National Piano Month. July is National Ice Cream Month (my favorite), and April is National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Month.

When discussing Jewish law concerning organ donation, we find several overarching principles. The most significant of these is *pikuah nefesh*, the mandate for us to do what we can to save a

person's life. The notion of *pikuah nefesh* is so powerful in fact that it overrides many of the laws of Shabbat. We learn from this that Judaism is very much in favor of organ donation. This is especially true in the case of living donors whose donation would cause minimal risk to their health.

The issue becomes more complex when discussing the use of organs from a deceased individual. Though the law of *kavod ha-met*, honoring the dead applies, the more important issue revolves around defining the moment of death. Originally the Rabbis used the "breath test," where a feather was placed over the person's mouth to see if they were still breathing. A

minority of Rabbis felt the lack of a heartbeat could also be an effective way of determining death. Today, a flat electroencephalogram is also considered an appropriate indicator.

Jews give to charitable causes in far greater proportion to our percentage of the population, but the same sadly cannot be said in the case of organ donation. In the words of Elliot Dorf in his book *Matters of Life and Death*, "In the United States, when asked to be donors, about 60 percent of the general population and their families consent, but only about 5 percent of Orthodox Jews do so, and the record of Conservative and Reform Jews is not much better."

There are many factors for this reluctance, but one of the most significant is when the dying individual does not indicate to his or her family members that they wish to be an organ donor. As we have seen, Jewish law encourages organ donation, as not only a great act of *pikuah nefesh*, but also as a way to engage in *Kiddush HaShem*, the sanctification of God's name. It is a gift we can give others in the same way God has given us the gift of life.

I encourage you to let your family know your wishes by registering to be an organ donor. You can register to be an organ donor at [azdonorregistry.org](http://azdonorregistry.org). In this time when we begin to celebrate the Exodus from Egypt and all of the gifts that freedom entails, may we also be encouraged to freely offer up *matan chayim*, the gift of life.

## BROTHERHOOD BUZZ

The Har Sinai Brotherhood would like to thank everyone who attended our joint breakfast with ARZA on March 21. It was a great success. We had a wonderful turnout, good food, and a thought provoking speaker, Dr. Arlene Bearman, who generated many questions. We also want to thank Sheila Mentz for arranging to have the Har Sinai Religious School students sing Israeli songs.

We all had a great time at Guys Night Out. It was a fun evening of camaraderie, good food and cheer. We all look forward to our next Night Out. We want to congratulate the winners of our Orioles Raffle:

- 1st prize Sam Dansicker - 2 tickets for 11 games including Opening Day
- 2nd prize Robert Getzenberg - 2 tickets for 10 games
- 3rd prize Scott Hayet - 2 tickets for 8 games

Please mark your calendars for our Brotherhood Breakfast on April 25. Our speaker will be Rabbi Crystal, and he will address us on the topic: "Reform Judaism: Past, Present and Future." Breakfast is free for Brotherhood members. Non-members and guests are \$5.00. Reservations are a must. RSVP by Wednesday, April 21, to Jay S. Burman (410) 833-0972 or email [burmanjs@verizon.net](mailto:burmanjs@verizon.net) or Marty Lavender (410) 484-5188 or email [mfml1229@verizon.net](mailto:mfml1229@verizon.net).

On Sunday, May 23, Brotherhood will host a Guided Walking

Tour of Camden Yards. We will learn about the history and workings of the ballpark and visit the dugout, bullpen, scoreboard control room, luxury boxes and more. The tour will last about 90 minutes, and elevators are available. The cost for adults is \$9.00; senior citizens and children (under 14) are \$6.00. For reservations call or email Fred Handelman at (410) 833-1208 or [fred1040@aol.com](mailto:fred1040@aol.com).

On June 13, join Brotherhood for an Orioles baseball game at our Annual Night at Camden Yards. More information to follow in the E-Connection and mid-month mailings.

If you have any programming ideas, please contact Rich Lebovitz at [rich.lebovitz@gmail.com](mailto:rich.lebovitz@gmail.com).

## Ushers Needed

One of the easiest ways to benefit the Har Sinai family is to join the Brotherhood Friday Night Ushers.

Men, women and families are welcomed to participate.

Choose a 6:15 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. Erev Shabbat Service. The average responsibility to serve is once every three months.

To join or for more information, contact Jay S. Burman at (410) 833-0972 or [burmanjs@verizon.net](mailto:burmanjs@verizon.net)