

Brother And Sister Donate Kidneys To Save Lives

To save one life is as if to save the entire world. —Talmud

Two years ago, Chaya Lipschutz, a young Jewish woman residing in Boro Park, Brooklyn, performed the greatest mitzvah of all — she saved a life by donating a kidney to a stranger.

"One day I saw an ad in the *Jewish Press* from a person who desperately needed a new kidney," she recalls. "I thought to myself, 'why not become a donor?' After all, I have two good kidneys and only need one."

The experience was so fulfilling that Chaya now devotes herself to convincing others to do the same. In March, her brother Yosef followed her example by also becoming a kidney donor.

Yosef Lipschutz and Mark (Menachem) Raymon, the grateful patient who was to receive Lipschutz's kidney, met for the first time at SUNY Downstate Medical Center the day before the procedure was to take place. While both men were undergoing a series of pre-tests, Chaya anxiously awaited the outcome.

Would her brother's kidney be a good match? Might he have a change of heart and not go through with it? "I needn't have worried," she now admits. "Yosef is so kind-hearted, he would never turn his back on someone who needs him."

For his part, Yosef was more concerned about what would happen after the operation. As someone who drives a car for a living, he could not afford to lose much time away from work. But his surgeon, Dr. Dale Distant, chief of the Transplant Service at Downstate Medical, assured him that his kidney could be removed laparoscopically, which would mean a smaller initial incision. By operating in this way, the post-operation discomfort and recovery time could be dramatically reduced. As it turned out, Yosef was able to leave the hospital after just two days.

Though she is overjoyed that her brother was able to save a life, Chaya worries that many people in need of a new kidney may not get one in time. "I would gladly donate my other kidney, if only I could," she says.

According to the National Kidney Foundation, 3,916 patients died last year while waiting for a kidney transplant. Nearly 70,000 people nationwide are currently on the waiting list, and 6,000 alone live in the New York metropolitan area. Surgeons at Downstate's University Hospital of Brooklyn performed 96 kidney transplants in 2006, but only 27 were from living donors.



(R-L) Donor Yosef Lipschutz and recipient Mark Raymon



(R-L) Donor Chaya Lipschutz and her recipient, Marcelle Bale Krieger

That is why Chaya has embarked on a crusade to raise public awareness about the need for organ donors.

During the Jewish Marketplace Expo at the Javits Center in December 2005, she rented a booth and, along with the help of Assemblyman Dov Hikind, found a local printer to produce 3,500 fliers free of charge to publicize this issue. Along with other kidney donors and recipients, she regularly speaks at public forums and synagogues and even goes on the Internet to reach potential donors.

Chaya has been the subject of articles in the *Jewish Press*, *Jewish Voice and Opinion*, Assemblyman Dov Hikind's newsletter, Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz's newsletter with more in the future. Last February, Chaya spoke on Assemblyman Dov Hikind's weekly radio show. Most recently, she was heard on National Public Radio's *This American Life*. As she explains on the program, "Donating a kidney was not difficult for me. I wasn't worried about the surgery. My greatest fear was that my mother would find out." Chaya was afraid her mother might have a heart attack if she knew.

To date, SUNY Downstate — Brooklyn's only academic medical center and the only hospital in the borough with an organ transplantation service — has performed over 4,000 transplant procedures. To encourage patients to learn as much as possible about transplantation, four transplant coordinators offer teaching and follow-up care and remain in close contact with patients and their families.

To learn more about the Transplantation Service, go to www.downstate.edu/transplant/