



Inspiring
stories of
kidney donors

FREEDOM!

No more dialysis!

MATNAT CHAIM 
VOLUNTEERS FOR KIDNEY TRANSPLANTATION

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Imagine a prisoner sitting in a dark and dingy cell serving a life sentence. Suddenly the door swings open and he is released - he is free! Out he flies like a butterfly in the field, seeing the flowers and rejoicing at the world outside the prison walls. This is the feeling of a dialysis patient when he hears that a kidney donor has offered to donate a kidney to him.

Whoever does not know what the reality of dialysis is like, should thank his Creator with all his heart that he possesses two functioning kidneys - or even one. The suffering of a dialysis patient is hard to describe. Dialysis can indeed keep a person alive - if that can be called living. Three times a week for several hours each time all of his life-blood is diverted to flow through a dialysis machine (an artificial kidney), where waste products are filtered out of the bloodstream. This process causes the patients to become exhausted and weakened. Moreover, the filtering membrane does not always distinguish between waste products and substances that are essential for normal functioning, causing many problematic side-effects that do not have effective treatments. In addition, the restrictions on food and even on drinking water are exceedingly onerous.



This, then, is the mission of Matnat Chaim – to liberate kidney patients from the ongoing misery of dialysis. So far almost 400 Israelis have voluntarily donated a kidney under the auspices of Matnat Chaim and thereby granted freedom to the recipients. But Rabbi Heber, the Chairman of Matnat Chaim isn't about to slow down. And that is because, currently, there are a staggering 5,800 people undergoing kidney dialysis treatment in Israel, and 850 of these patients are on the national transplant waiting list for a cadaver kidney. By raising awareness for living kidney transplants, Rabbi Heber's ultimate goal is to eliminate the five to seven year waiting lists for kidney donations.

By receiving a kidney, dialysis patients are granted freedom. As for the donors themselves, they in turn gain elevated feelings of joy and satisfaction that can last a lifetime. As one donor put it, "You have it in your power to save somebody's life; think what that does for yours!"

On Chanukah, the festival commemorating our religious freedom, please do consider bestowing physical freedom on a prisoner of dialysis.

We invite you to read and be inspired by the stories of our kidney donors.

Chanuka Sameach!

The editor

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These and many others have already donated life!



You can too.

I'M NO HERO

Hila Halevi

What makes a mechanical engineering student, a rational person who is building his own family, wake up one day and make a dramatic decision: "I want to donate one of my kidneys to save a Jewish child's life"? What motivated him? And how does he now feel about the step he took? What was his wife's reaction, and how has his kidney donation affected his life? And what about the family of Yisrael Malkiel, the boy whose life was saved thanks to the kidney donation – what do they think?

All this and more in the article below.

We meet Elyashiv Hiller, a modest and quietly-spoken man, and he quietly tells us his incredible story.

Elyashiv, tell us about yourself.

There's nothing special or unique about my life that's different from the lives of my peers in our social circle. I was educated in Religious Zionist schools, served in the armored corps, and studied at Yeshivat Elon Moreh. After my marriage, I studied mechanical engineering. We lived in the Shomron until recently, when we moved

to a charming community called Merhav Am. I consider myself a 'disciple' of Rabbi Elyakim Levanon, Rosh Yeshiva of Elon Moreh. He's my rabbi and I consult him for all the important decisions in my life.



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So what made someone like you suddenly decide to take such a significant step, to donate one of your kidneys to someone else?

When I was still studying in yeshiva, there was public debate about organ donation. Rabbi Levanon expressed his opinion that it is very important to donate organs (within the framework of halacha, that is organ donations that do not cause death) and it is considered saving lives – and anyone who saves one Jewish life is considered as if he saved an entire world. This way of thinking strongly spoke to me, but was still nothing more than a nice idea.

Around a year ago, one Shabbat in Elul, I found an issue of the *Sichat Hashavua* parsha sheet, which included an interview with Rabbi Heber, the Chairman of Matnat Chaim, an organization involved with kidney transplants. Rabbi Heber talked about the organization and the special significance of this act, and it spoke to me. Amazingly, Rabbi Levanon gave a talk on this same topic that same Shabbat, and explained that an organ donation is an incomparable mitzvah, despite it not being obligatory in Jewish law.

That Shabbat I knew that this was what I wanted to do. I felt that if I could save a Jewish life this way, I wanted to do it! I started doing more research. And

then I went to ask my rabbi and teacher for advice – what does he think about this for me personally, on a practical basis? Should I do it? I have to mention that even though he emphasized to me that it isn't an actual religious obligation, in any event, it is an unparalleled one-time mitzvah. And highly recommended.

How did your wife react to these developments?

Both my wife and I are very rational people. Both in character and in how we run our lives. Therefore, when I shared my hesitations and my intention to go in this direction, she accepted it as natural. She understood me well and fully supported me in actually carrying out my decision in practice. Of course we checked out all the significance and medical repercussions of such a step, and after we were satisfied and understood that there was no real danger, I submitted a request to Matnat Chaim to donate one of my kidneys to save a life.

What is the procedure leading up to a kidney donation?

The procedure begins with initial testing that examines all aspects of your suitability to donate. After it is

ascertained that you are healthy and able to donate a kidney, and your blood type, you are authorized to complete the medical testing process and you can choose to what kind of person you wish to donate. Of course, there is also an organized government-appointed medical committee that interviews you to check that you are donating of your own free will without any emotional or financial pressure. Then they make you an appointment for the transplant surgery in a hospital.

Did you know the boy prior to the donation?

No. I didn't speak to him before and didn't even meet him.

Why not?

Deep down I understood that this was the best thing I could do in life. It came from my head. I saw it as something pure and unadulterated. I well knew that all kinds of objections would arise. For example, regarding the question of "whose life shall I save?" Even though I belong to a particular religious-ideological stream, I never thought for a moment that my donation should specifically go to a Jew from the same sector. I wanted to save the life of any Jew. However, I had a real fear (that was unfounded in the end) that something would change in my wish to donate when I got to know the person receiving the kidney. I preferred not to know, to be completely at peace with the fact that I had saved a Jew.

What was the greatest moment for you in the whole process, since making your decision?

Elyashiv is silent and thinks for a while. I can see that he is reliving many events. He hesitates a little more and then answers almost in a whisper, "the moment I met the boy whose life I had saved."

What happened then?

It was three days after the surgery. The boy was hospitalized in Schneider Children's Medical Center, close to where I was hospitalized in Beilinson

Hospital. I decided to go and see him. I was still weak, but I wanted to meet him already. I got to the ICU at Schneider and asked to enter the room. The nurse asked me, "Are you a relative?" I answered, "Something like that..." The first person to recognize me was actually his mother - a mother who knew that one of my organs had been transferred to her son and become a part of him. I saw the look on her face at that moment. I'll never forget it. She was in shocked silence for a minute and then burst out in heartrending tears. I didn't know how to react. And then I saw him, the sweet, suffering child who lay there, in the bed that was too big for him. I saw his little face smile at me from beyond the tubes that surrounded his body. And suddenly, it hit me, like lightning: this is my child! This is a life that I gave. My kidney is now working in his body and letting him live. Everything that happens from now onwards in this boy's life, his entire spiritual world that he will build – it's all possible because of me. It was only then that the penny finally dropped and I understood the significance of what I had done.

That moment I was filled with an incredible feeling that I had never felt before. It's something that words cannot describe.

It was really the ultimate moment of this process, and perhaps the ultimate moment of my life.

At this point we ask Galit, Yisrael's mother, to join the conversation and tell us how she sees things from her vantage point as a mother.

What can you tell us about the moment that Elyashiv described here? How did you see him at that moment? What were you thinking?



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First of all, all our lives we will be grateful to Elyashiv for the gift he gave us. Before the surgery we also didn't want to be in touch for the simple reason that we were nervous that if we would meet, he would feel under emotional pressure, which we didn't want. We saw him once, at one of the medical committees, when we went in and he left at that same moment. We were really interested in who he was. We researched him a little and we knew that he was a 28-year old National Zionist

from one of the families who had been expelled from Gush Katif. We never dreamt that he was married with three children, the youngest of whom was a month old. We only found that out when Yisrael and Elyashiv were in adjacent operating theaters. We met his mother in the waiting room, and she told us. We were in shock. Even before that we really admired his donation. But when we understood his background and family status, we felt he had turned into an angel. And then he came to visit Yisrael. That was three days after the transplant surgery.

A child's hug

Yisrael called Elyashiv to come close to his bed. He asked him to come nearer and nearer, raised his arms that were still attached to IV tubing, and hugged Elyashiv, as hot tears rolled down his cheeks. Yisrael still couldn't talk much, so he only repeated again and again, "Thank you, thank you, really". They remained embraced for a few minutes and I, watching, cried like a little girl. An unbreakable connection was created in those moments. Yisrael calls him every erev Shabbat.

We didn't know who the donor would be, just like Elyashiv didn't know who he was donating to. In theory, Elyashiv could have donated to someone completely different, with a different background or different religious level. Of course, that wouldn't have stopped him donating his kidney, but we see special Divine Providence in this, that we have had the privilege of connecting to such a special person, and Elyashiv has also expressed his joy on several occasions that Heaven merited him to donate his kidney to a Jewish boy who observes Torah and mitzvahs. We have become like family, with his dear, incredible wife, who supported him unconditionally the entire time, and his delightful children, whom I love like my own.

What message would you like to give to anyone reading this wonderful story?

My husband gives lectures to soldiers on behalf of the Chief Rabbinate. He always talks about being grateful, how important gratitude is in a Jew's life. My husband now tells the story of our donor and asks the audience, "Which of you would be willing to actually donate a kidney to a Jew who he doesn't know?" After they hear Elyashiv's story from him, many hands are raised... It taught us that the Jewish people's basic desire to help one another exists far beyond what we think. And we also see that we simply have to explain it to people. Many people don't understand what the procedure means, how it works, and how simple it is to do.

The reason we tell our story publicly is that we learnt from our case that the more people are exposed to it, more people will be saved. Elyashiv told us that he found out about this from a copy of *Sichat Hashavua* that included an interview with Rabbi Heber, the Chairman of Matnat Chaim. Perhaps someone will read our story, and understand that he too can do it.

The greatest defendant

Another few words in conclusion. Our son was born with a kidney problem and he has lived with it for twelve years. He was about to begin dialysis treatments. We turned to Rabbi Heber, who is one of the most amazing people we have ever met, and he took our case "personally" (we found out later that he does this with every case...). We didn't dream that our child wouldn't need to begin dialysis. There is nothing like this anywhere in the world. It is simply unbelievable. At every medical committee, they asked both us, and of course the donor, "What is your personal interest? What's the catch?" Matnat Chaim is an admirable organization, that would never survive without its two unique characteristics – the first is the person who heads the organization (he himself received a kidney donation in the past), Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber, who lives and breathes Matnat Chaim. He sees it as his purpose on earth, and he is totally devoted to it day and night, to organize more and more transplants.

And the second characteristic is – "Who is like Your people, Israel, one nation on earth?" You simply discover what a Jewish soul is. The deep connection between every Jew. Nothing like it exists among any other nation. I believe that Matnat Chaim, that

unites the donors and recipients, is the Jewish people's greatest Heavenly defendant!

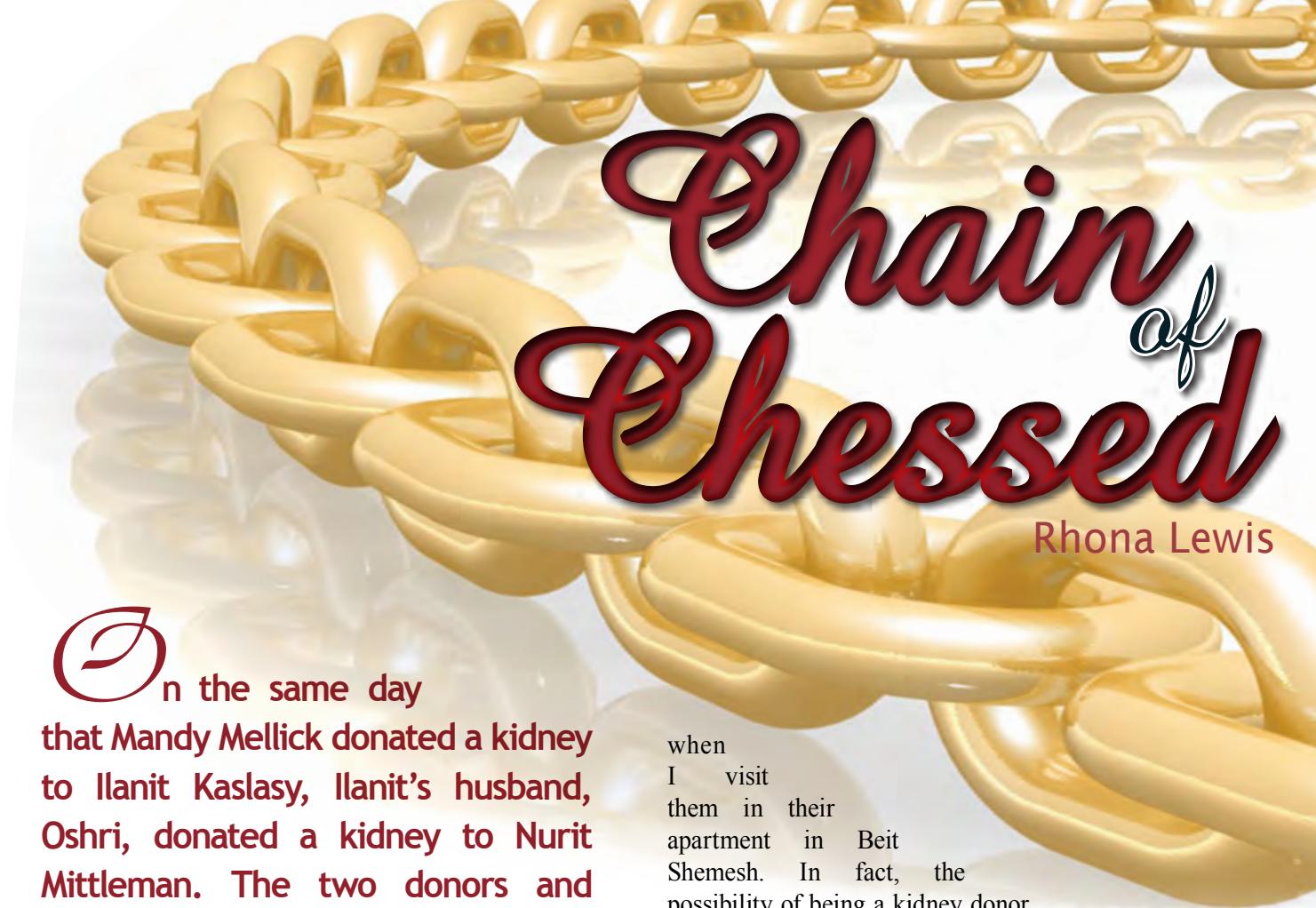
We turn once more to Elyashiv Hiller, to hear a conclusion.

Elyashiv, do you feel your life has changed since the transplant?

Since the transplant, I have a certain special feeling of being uplifted. I feel a deep internal sense of belonging to the Jewish people. This is an incredible feeling with which I was previously almost unfamiliar. I feel literally a partner, a real part of the Jewish people, and it gives me a really special feeling that I can't put into words.

I wish that feeling to everyone who is part of the Jewish people.





Chain of Chessed

Rhona Lewis

On the same day that Mandy Mellick donated a kidney to Ilanit Kaslasy, Ilanit's husband, Oshri, donated a kidney to Nurit Mittleman. The two donors and two recipients are linked together forever through this chain of chessed - and it's thanks to Matnat Chaim. Founded by Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber, the organization works to facilitate kidney donations.

Mandy Mellick



"Although I was a bit stunned when Mandy first told me that she wanted to donate, I knew it was the sort of thing that she would do," says Brian, Mandy's husband,

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when I visit them in their apartment in Beit Shemesh. In fact, the possibility of being a kidney donor had been rooted in Mandy's consciousness many years previously.

Originally from Southend, southeast of London, UK, Mandy made aliyah when she was twenty-three years old. "About 10 years ago, I read an article about kidney donation. I felt it was something I wanted to do, but it wasn't practical to do it then, the kids were too young. I guess I filed it away in the back of my mind for the future," she says.

Once Mandy's youngest child turned eighteen, Mandy, now a technical writer at HPE, began researching the idea and found Matnat Chaim's site immediately. Becoming an altruistic donor (a donor who gives to an unknown recipient) was suddenly very possible.

Of course there was the concern factor. "Mandy researches everything, so I was sure she had researched this well," says Brian. "But naturally I read up on it myself." In fact, medical research shows that there is little long-term risk for kidney donors, as long as careful and comprehensive medical tests are conducted before the donation. Long-term survival rate, quality of life, general health status and risk of kidney failure are about

the same for donors and non-donors.

When Mandy began the long and rigorous testing process, including a meeting with a social worker and psychologist, she didn't tell her parents or her children. "Many people are rejected," she says, showing her practical streak. "Tests must be scheduled and sometimes there can be a few weeks wait between tests. It certainly gives you time to make sure that this is what you want to do." Some tests, like the 24-hour blood pressure test she did, were trickier to hide from the children. But it was clear, once Mandy received the final go-ahead and told them about her plans, that her children had not suspected a thing. "They were surprised, but very supportive, and proud that I was doing this," she says. "My work was also very supportive, which made the process easier."

Mandy didn't have any preferences concerning her recipient, and initially did not want to know who the person was. "I felt that I didn't want to know if the transplant was not successful, which happens sometimes; and I didn't want the recipient to feel indebted to me in any way."

The double transplant took place after Pesach last year, at the Beilinson Medical Center in Petach Tikva.

In the hospital post-surgery, after hearing that Ilanit was asking repeatedly to meet and thank her donor, Mandy finally agreed to meet her. "I was pleased that the recipient was a young mother, someone that I could relate to," she says, "And I'm glad I did meet Ilanit in the end." When Ilanit, Oshri, and their children came to visit the Mellick family a month later, Ilanit brought along an ultrasound image of Mandy's kidney inside her. "That's when it really hit home, that my kidney was now a part of Ilanit," says Mandy with a laugh.

Two days after the operation, Mandy was back home, and within two weeks she was able to work from home. She didn't tell many people that she was going to donate, but the double donation hit the news. "I asked that they blur my face in the newspaper photo, so that people would not be able to identify me. But at least one person still figured out it was me!" she says. Still, Mandy kept the lid on—until now. "I realize that raising awareness about the ease of kidney donation is important. The more people read about it, the more potential donors will be inspired, and more people can receive kidneys," she says.

Ilanit and Oshri Kaslasy

"Not every husband would fight for his wife like Oshri did for me," says Ilanit her tempo upbeat and cheerful. Interestingly, their connection began years before their marriage - when Ilanit's father, a barber in Katamon, south-central Jerusalem, gave Oshri his first hair cut at three years old.

The first inkling that something wasn't quite right came a year after their marriage, when twenty-two-year-old Ilanit was expecting her first child. In hospital for two days due to high blood pressure, a routine urine test showed that there was a problem with her kidneys. After giving birth to her son, Liam, at 36 weeks, Ilanit underwent a renal biopsy that showed she was suffering from focal segmental glomerulosclerosis. FSGS is a rare disease that attacks the kidney's filtering units (glomeruli) causing serious scarring which leads to permanent kidney damage and even failure. "The nephrologist told me there was nothing to do at this point, except blood tests every six months. Although he warned that another pregnancy would put my kidneys under stress, a year later, I gave birth to a baby girl and four years after that to a baby boy. When you're feeling absolutely fine, it's hard to take warnings like this seriously," she says.

Ilanit worked as a kindergarten teacher's aide for the next five years. Then, three years ago, she began to feel the effects of her weakened kidneys. "At work, I'd get so tired that I could hardly stay awake. I lost my appetite for the cheeses, fish and meat that I usually loved and I was throwing up every morning. But since I didn't feel any pain at all, I just kept going," she says.

At her next visit to the nephrologist, Ilanit described all her symptoms. In addition, her level of creatinine (a waste product produced by muscles of the body and washed out by the kidneys) was elevated. Although her symptoms pointed to dialysis, since her creatinine level was only nominally high, the doctor decided against this.

Ilanit however, was feeling sick enough to visit Dr. David Darmon at the Hadassah Medical Center. He immediately recommended a kidney transplant and told Ilanit to start to look for a donor. "I wasn't particularly worried because I didn't realize how bad my situation

was. And since I have six siblings, I was pretty sure I'd find a match easily," Ilanit says.

Oshri, however, was worried. When he realized that his blood type was incompatible with Ilanit's, he pushed for the right tests to be sent to Ilanit's siblings and, as a taxi driver, often drove to Beilinson Hospital in Petach Tikva to cajole the medical staff to bring forward appointments.

When finding a family donor didn't work out, even Ilanit began to panic. "We knew that the waiting list for a transplant is seven years. Despite the pre-dialysis care, I was feeling so bad that I stopped working and applied for disability allowance," says Ilanit.

Oshri's persistence paid off when a member of the nursing staff at Beilinson suggested that the Kaslasys contact Rabbi Heber. Here, they learned that if Oshri were to donate his kidney to another patient, Ilanit would automatically be granted priority. It meant saving two lives at once.

"The day we heard that I had a donor we were even happier than the days when our children were born. We couldn't believe that there are people as good as Mandy in the world," says Ilanit, the excitement still evident in her voice. Despite the excitement, the Kaslasys, fearful that the testing (which would still take several months to complete) would show a problem or that the donor would back out, kept the good news a secret until two weeks before the operation.

While Mandy was going through the required tests, Ilanit started dialysis. For five and a half months, she spent four hours a day, three times a week at Misgav Ladach Hospital undergoing the treatments. Dialysis isn't a smooth ride in the least. Low blood pressure, muscle cramps, itching, sleep problems, anemia, bone disease, fluid overload, are only some of the side effects. For

Ilanit, it meant sleepless nights and panic attacks. "It was a terrible time," says Ilanit. "I still can't believe that I fell apart like I did. Often, in the middle of the night, I'd be sure that I couldn't breathe. While

Oshri was sleeping, I'd drive myself to the hospital. The staff got to know me and we'd spend hours talking until I drove back home, showered, and drove back to the hospital for another dialysis treatment."

"April 28, 2015." The transplant date rolls off Ilanit's tongue with the same lilt we use when we say our birth date. Although Ilanit was worried about how the children would cope with both parents post-surgery, Oshri was adamant about undergoing surgery on the same day as Ilanit. "Just like you're counting down the days, my recipient is also waiting," he said.

"When I was wheeled into the hospital, I was yellow and my hands were terribly swollen from the poisons that filled my blood. And yet, in the evening, I suddenly felt a surge of strength and stood up. I wasn't in the least bit worried; only deliriously happy," recalls Ilanit.

Ilanit's recovery was rapid. "The moment I woke up in the recovery room, I squeezed my fingers together—for the first time in years, they felt normal. Mandy's kidney was working so well that I was already thirsty. I had come in with a creatinine level of 10 and just one day after surgery, the level was down to 1.8." A week later, back at home, Ilanit surged back to running her home. "I cooked lunch and changed the linens. I put out the children's clothes for the next day. These were all things I simply hadn't had the strength to do. I wanted the children to know that their mother was back," says Ilanit. She pauses and adds, "My children were traumatized: my kidney failure didn't hurt them physically, but it hurt their souls. Now therapy is helping them to heal. Mandy didn't save just my life; she saved my home. Only Hashem can reward her."

Nurit Mittleman

Seventy-year-old Nurit Mittleman was born in Holon. Her problems began thirteen years ago, when a tumor was discovered in one of her kidneys. Although the growth was successfully removed, her second kidney started to get weaker. "Kidneys work in tandem," explains Nurit as an aside. "Which is why fear of disease needn't stop a donor. If, Heaven forbid, someone would fall ill, having two kidneys instead of one won't help."

Progressively weakened, Nurit had to close down the kindergarten that she had founded. From there, it was a short step to dialysis. "I had been sure that I'd find a donor, but it hadn't happened, so psychologically, I was hit hard," says Nurit. "And dialysis itself was so traumatic that I prefer not to think about it. I had warm

family support; I received excellent care during my treatments in Ramat Gan in Afek, a healthcare facility run by the Leumit Health Fund. And yet, I was terribly sad. Three times a week, at six in the morning, I'd leave the house in a taxi and undergo dialysis for four hours. My blood pressure went up and down; I lost weight. Of course, aside from two cups of water a day, I couldn't drink. I would fill a cup and take little sips throughout the day. I tried to live a normal life and enjoy my grandchildren, but I couldn't," says Nurit, the pain evident in her voice. She pauses and adds, "Perhaps when you're younger, you can take things more in your stride."

Nurit's husband and three children continued their search for a donor fruitlessly, until they finally found Matnat Chaim. "Rabbi Heber made a wonderful impression on us," says Nurit. "When we met, he shared his own journey of kidney disease, the transplant that eventually saved his life and his decision to devote himself to helping others. Although he didn't promise us anything, and I knew that most people would probably prefer to donate to someone younger, we came away very hopeful."

Nurit continued with dialysis for six months. Then, at the beginning of 2015, she was ecstatic to hear that Matnat Chaim had found a donor for her. Unfortunately, at the last minute, the potential transplant was cancelled for an unknown reason. But, two months later, a second call came and Nurit was given a transplant date.

Nurit describes the excitement and tension at the transplant center at Beilinson as patients and families waited for the procedure to begin. "Although we were forbidden to approach anyone, we tried to guess who my donor was. When I saw Ilanit and Oshri, I knew it was him," she says.

"Being older, my recovery was more complicated," says Nurit. "It didn't take long for me to understand that the kidney wasn't functioning. I was devastated. I held on to the hope that it often takes time for the kidney to start to work. And this was what happened in my case. Four days later, I was told that my creatinine levels were going down," she says.

"Rabbi Heber and his wife were always a source of support. Not only did they come to visit me in hospital, I knew I could always call Rabbi Heber, even right before candle lighting before Shabbat, to hear his encouraging words," says Nurit. "These days, I feel great. I think of my transplant all the time. I'm constantly amazed that Oshri's kidney is a part of me."

What Does the Halacha Say?

Living kidney donations are halachically approved. The great rabbis Ovadia Yosef *zt"l*, Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *zt"l* and Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt"l*, as well as the greatest Torah minds of today, Harav Aharon Leib Steinman *shlita* and Harav Chaim Kanievsky *shlita*, have all approved living kidney donations. "Although one is not obligated to do so, it is a great mitzvah," writes Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky

(Derech Sicha, Parshat Vayera).



Harav Chaim Kanievsky *shlita*

don't think about the fact that you saved someone's life. Just like a mother doesn't think about the fact that she gave life to her children."



A life-saving revolution is underway!

"If I knew three more people like Rabbi Heber, I'd become religious," said one of Israel's most senior journalists, after interviewing the chairman of Matnat Chaim. The interview, of course, dealt with only one subject: Matnat Chaim and the revolution of living kidney transplants that is taking place in Israel today.

The "revolution", which has so far saved the lives of nearly 400 people, began in 2007 when Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber, a school principal and a teacher at a prominent Jerusalem yeshiva, suffered sudden kidney failure and was forced to undergo difficult dialysis treatments until he received a kidney donation from a friend. Since that time, he and his wife have devoted themselves to the task of finding one kidney donor after another. Whether at home or at the office, while traveling and during meetings, they are concentrating on just one thing: finding the next kidney donor and saving another Israeli life. Everything else is commentary.

Rabbi Heber likes to begin meetings by saying, "I suggest you sit with me for less than half an hour. If the meeting goes any longer you may find that you're left with only one kidney because you donated the other one!" It's hard to argue with him because it's quite clear that Israel's dramatically high rate of altruistic kidney donation is largely due to Rabbi Heber's charismatic personality.

Doctors and medical experts from all over the world have expressed amazement at the huge change in the statistics regarding live



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As he says, "As time passes, increasing numbers of

kidney donation in Israel over the past few years – the rate has more than doubled since Matnat Chaim was established. Hundreds of kidney recipients owe him their lives. We spoke with Rabbi Heber about his accomplishments and his hopes for the future.

In the early days of Matnat Chaim, people thought Rabbi Heber was, at best, a dreamer; at worst, people ridiculed his idea of widespread altruistic kidney donation. "When I first began to speak to people about donating a kidney, I realized that the main roadblock was the total lack of awareness. The public knew nothing about kidney donation. It sounded terrifying, bizarre, divorced from reality. Even today I get many questions from people who have never thought about such a thing in their lives. There has certainly been an increase in awareness. The public is more aware and the numbers speak for themselves – nearly 400 people have donated."

Rabbi Heber lives in Jerusalem's Har Nof neighborhood, and loves nothing more than to immerse himself in the study of Torah with his students. However, in recent years he has been completely devoted to the mission he has taken upon himself. Rabbi Heber's single-minded dedication is unique; his personal story, along with his extraordinary charisma, self-sacrifice and great faith in his cause, have enabled him to bring about one of the greatest revolutions in Israeli medical history. Hundreds of lives have been saved by Rabbi Heber and his amazing kidney donors.

DONATING LIFE

In a ceremony which took place recently in Israel's Knesset, Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber, the founder and Chairman of Matnat Chaim, received the Health Minister's Shield for exemplary volunteerism. The award was presented by the Health Minister, Rabbi Yaakov Litzman, in recognition of Rabbi Heber's achievements on behalf of patients with renal disease in Israel, and for his success in raising awareness of the need for living kidney donations. Nearly four hundred people have donated kidneys through Matnat Chaim, with no monetary compensation, transforming the lives of patients with whom they had no prior personal connection.

During the week in which Rabbi Heber received his award, Matnat Chaim facilitated twenty-four different surgeries - 12 kidney removals and 12 transplants, and thereby saved the lives of 12 kidney patients!

As Rabbi Heber said at the ceremony: "Our altruistic kidney donors, who give of themselves to others, save lives! I hope that we will succeed in seeing our revolution through to the end so that through mutual responsibility and true compassion of our citizens, Israel will become the first Western country without a waiting list for transplants."



people have their names added to the waiting list for kidneys and yet more people continue to suffer in the hospitals. The dialysis department is a dreadful place. It is a terrifying experience that has a devastating effect on people, body and soul, but it is the only way to keep an end-stage kidney patient alive without a transplant. Sometimes I feel like crying when I think of the plight of the friends I left behind in the dialysis clinic. My hope is that we will find sufficient numbers of donors that there will be no more dialysis patients in Israel waiting for a transplant."

Rabbi Heber's message began to penetrate the consciousness of the Israeli public once his personal story became more widely known. "I never dreamed that I would be in the public eye and I never wanted publicity. It doesn't suit me at all. I never thought I would see my picture in the newspapers as I walk down the street. I'm a simple man and I live a simple life. I go along with it all because it's so important that as many people as possible should understand that there are still large numbers of people from all ethnic groups on the waiting list for transplants. I'm willing to do whatever it takes, including telling my personal story, if it will encourage other people to do this noble act and save a patient from the hell of dialysis."

Anyone who knows Rabbi Heber appreciates how true this statement is – that he and his family instinctively shy away from publicity. But the fact is that since Rabbi Heber has agreed to be featured in every possible newspaper and magazine, as well as on television and radio, more people have begun to look into the possibility of kidney donation. Rabbi Heber notes, "It's certainly true that donating a kidney is not easy. The donor must be in excellent physical health and undergo a wide-ranging series of medical and psychological tests to ensure that his or her health will not be compromised and also to ensure that there is no element of organ trafficking. But at the end of the process the donor has the profound satisfaction of knowing that he or she has rescued someone from dialysis and all its hardships and even from early death, and there is no more exalted feeling than that!"

Today more than 800 Israelis are waiting for kidney donations while enduring exhausting and painful dialysis treatments. Rabbi Heber explains once again that the idea of Matnat Chaim originated from his desire to rescue the friends he left behind in the dialysis clinic. "In the clinic

I met a young man from a family who had already lost a son, and we became very close. In the end, following my own transplant I was able to walk out of there, but for him no donor was found in time, and to my great sorrow he died suddenly while on his way to dialysis. I promised myself that I would do everything possible to find donors for the others that I knew in dialysis, and for all those who would come later. I myself have been through the pain, the wrenching physical and mental anguish, and I understand that it is actually possible that with relatively little effort these people can be saved. It is certainly true that the donor must undergo an operation, but that is a small price to pay to save a life – to return a functioning father or mother to their children or to save a child who still has his entire life ahead of him! For the donor it means a relatively minor procedure with a short period of inconvenience, but for the recipient it means a second chance at a full, healthy life!"

Rabbi Heber has received the Presidential Volunteer Medal as well as the Health Minister's Shield, both recognizing his exemplary volunteerism. These two awards demonstrate the extent to which the idea of living kidney donation has penetrated Israel society, slowly and surely turning an option that wasn't previously on the table into a real possibility. Rabbi Heber's vision has become a reality. Today there are

dozens of potential kidney donations in the pipeline, with potential altruistic donors undergoing testing for suitability and for compatibility with their respective recipients.

"We are dealing with

human life. There are so many people who could donate but are simply unaware of the possibility, or lack awareness concerning the vital importance of the procedure. I'm sure that within a few years, with G-d's help, there will be far fewer people on the waiting list and that we'll win this battle. The rate of altruistic donation in Israel is probably the highest in the world. But the most meaningful outcome is in the home of each recipient with the return to the family of a healthy father, mother or child."

One of the most frequent questions to Rabbi Heber concerns the mistaken impression that observant Jews are forbidden to donate organs owing to the restrictions of Jewish law. Non-religious people who learn about Rabbi Heber and Matnat Chaim are often surprised. He responds by noting that nearly all of today's leading halachic authorities whole-heartedly support kidney donation by a living donor. The prohibition of organ donation by

some rabbis concerns the harvesting of organs from cadavers, an issue that Matnat Chaim does not deal with at all. Jewish law regarding living donation is fully in line with current medical opinion: that living kidney donation is permitted and desirable.

Above Rabbi Heber's desk is a large whiteboard which lists (first names only, to protect medical confidentiality) all the donor-recipient pairs currently in progress – a testament not only to Matnat Chaim's achievements but more importantly to a bright future for Israel's kidney patients.

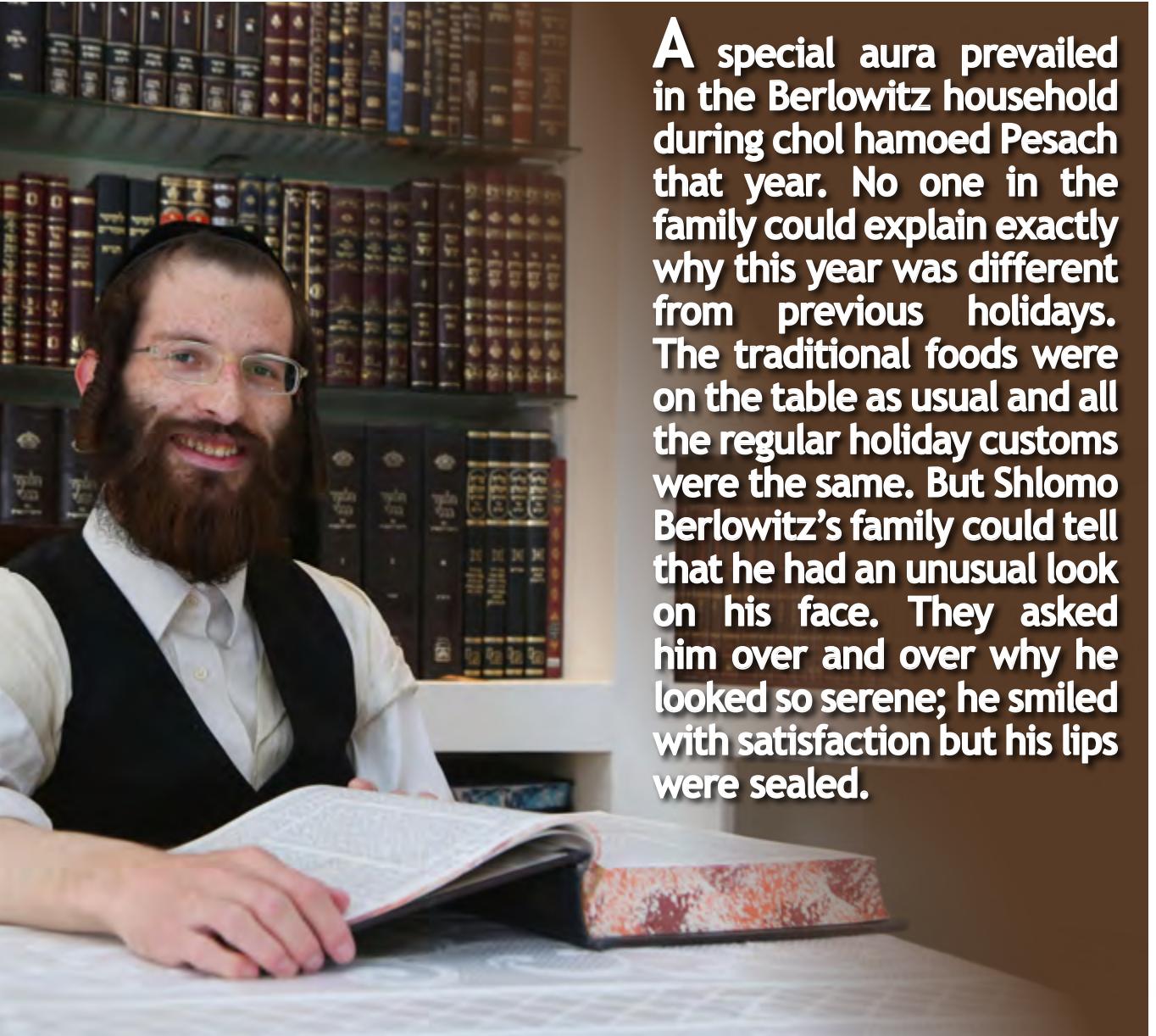
"Our work is not yet done. There are still hundreds of patients waiting for kidneys and I pray to G-d that we will succeed in helping as many of them as possible. Anyone who is medically able to donate a kidney and is interested in considering it can receive all the necessary information from Matnat Chaim, on our website or in our offices. Matnat Chaim will accompany you all along the way. I hope and pray that we will succeed in proving that the phrase 'all Jews are responsible for one another' can be a living reality."



FREEDOM!
No more dialysis!

FOR THE SAKE OF MY BROTHERS AND FRIENDS

Avraham Cohen



A special aura prevailed in the Berlowitz household during chol hamoed Pesach that year. No one in the family could explain exactly why this year was different from previous holidays. The traditional foods were on the table as usual and all the regular holiday customs were the same. But Shlomo Berlowitz's family could tell that he had an unusual look on his face. They asked him over and over why he looked so serene; he smiled with satisfaction but his lips were sealed.

When the holiday was over, Shlomo had a long talk with his wife. "Did you see this booklet which was distributed with the local newspaper?" he asked her. "I read the stories in it and I found them very moving." His wife read the stories about kidney donation with great interest and was very moved. "Wonderful!" she called out when she finished. "Really touching!" she continued, without understanding exactly why her husband had asked her to read the booklet.

Shlomo decided to reveal what was in his heart. "I've been walking around for a week with the strangest feeling. I read about all those unfortunate people whose stories appear in the booklet and about the terrible suffering of dialysis patients and I realized that I had to make a decision." Shlomo's wife didn't yet understand what her husband was getting at, and he continued: "I decided that I want to be a part of this. I want to perform this act of true kindness, this act that can't be measured in money or gifts. I want to be a kidney donor."

Dead silence reigned in the living room of the Berlowitz house. The lady of the house sat transfixed, staring in stunned silence at her husband. He went on: "I want us to reach this decision together. I wanted you to read the stories and try to understand the anguish of the patients so that it would be easier for you to appreciate what I feel."

But his wife was not so easily convinced. "Why is this your business?" she asked emotionally. "Why do you want to get yourself involved in this?" Shlomo was taken aback for a moment by his wife's reaction, but he didn't give up.

"This means saving a life! And if I can save the life of another Jew, why shouldn't I do it? Read the second story in the booklet again. See what suffering that

FREEDOM!
No more dialysis!

kidney recipient went through as he waited two years for help! See how many dialysis treatments he could have avoided if a donor had been found sooner."

The minutes passed and the tension that had built up at the beginning of the conversation began to fade. "Nu already, if you want to, then I agree" she said after long minutes of contemplation. Shlomo jumped for joy. "My *eshes chail*" he said as his face reflected his delight. "You will earn the merit from this mitzvah exactly as I will".

I read about all those unfortunate people whose stories appear in the booklet and about the terrible suffering of dialysis patients and I realized that I had to make a decision. I decided that I want to be a part of this. I want to be a kidney donor.

"I have always been the type of person who loves to give," says Shlomo. "Even when young I used to donate blood in the Magen David Adom station in my home town. When I finished reading the booklet I had already reached a decision to donate my kidney to someone who desperately needed one. But until I discussed it with my wife and gotten her OK, I couldn't actually start."

Shlomo is just 25 years old and has been married for four years. His friends describe him as a happy person whose abundant energy spills out over everyone in his Bet Shemesh neighborhood. "As soon as my wife said yes, I got right to work. I had no second thoughts at all." He did not know personally any kidney recipients or donors or even any kidney patients. "Within my own family everyone is, *baruch Hashem*, healthy. But when I got involved in the process I learned that in my own Vizhnitz Hasidic community four members had received kidney transplants just in the past year. I didn't know exactly what I was in for, but I was one-hundred-percent sure of my decision."

As soon as Pesach was over, he approached Matnat Chaim and asked to begin the series of tests to determine if he was a suitable kidney donor. "The professionalism and warmth of the staff strengthened my decision even further. I was a real nudnik. I would call every few days to check the results of the tests and if a week passed without my hearing from them, I quickly turned to them to find what was holding things up."

When he received the positive answer he was waiting for, Shlomo promptly arranged to meet with the Vizhnitzer Rebbe. "I knew that before taking the final

step I would seek the blessing of my Rebbe. When I asked the Rebbe what he thought of kidney donation he looked at me in amazement and said: 'What's the question? If you are able to do it there is no greater mitzvah!' He blessed me with especially great warmth and wished me success and good health. The minute I left his room I called Rabbi Heber and informed him that I was ready. When Rabbi Heber informed me that a compatible recipient had been located, I was so happy I danced for joy."

Uri Stern, a resident of Jerusalem suffering from renal failure was Shlomo's designated recipient. Uri had undergone two and a half years of painful and exhausting dialysis treatments. Shlomo continues: "I met Uri the first time by chance. He was exhausted after returning from dialysis, but even so the excitement was evident in his face. I went to shake his hand and I told him that he didn't owe me anything. I told him that I had decided to donate my kidney to whoever needs it most so that he had no need to feel any special debt of gratitude to me."

The testing procedures were completed quickly and Shlomo found himself ready for the operation just before Sukkos. "The tests were not a problem for me at all. I had read in the booklets of Matnat Chaim that some donors found the testing to be exhausting, but I disagree. With each test I felt like I was taking one more step towards the great day. Every test that I passed was part of the enormous excitement on the way to my goal."

Shlomo's family supported him every step of the way. His wife and children accompanied him to the operating room with enthusiasm at least as great as his own. "Before the operation I met the recipient again. He tried to thank me, but I made clear to him and also to his children that they owed me nothing. It was a very emotional meeting. I truly felt like a groom on his wedding day, approaching the most important moment in his life."

The operation took place in Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, and it was the first Matnat Chaim transplant to be performed there. Shlomo described his feelings before the surgery: "In the moments before the operation, the excitement was intense. I felt exactly as

When Rabbi Heber informed me that a compatible recipient had been located, I was so happy I danced for joy."

I feel at Ne'ilah on Yom Kippur, when our fate is being sealed. I prayed for other sick people whose names I had been given and I recalled the warm words of the Rebbe when he blessed me that I should have a full and speedy recovery."

The transplant went well and the kidney was perfectly compatible with the recipient. Some hours after the operation, Shlomo found himself in the recovery room, missing one kidney but filled with emotion. "When I heard that my donated kidney was functioning, it gave me the strength to tolerate any pain. I thought to myself that from now on the recipient would no longer have to undergo dialysis. I found that to be very moving, very encouraging. Each doctor who came to report on the recipient's condition gave me enormous strength to deal with the after-effects of the operation."

Shlomo recuperated quickly and soon returned to his studies. "People keep asking me if this whole procedure was worth the pain and the side-effects that it caused. I tell them that all the pain in the world is worth this action. There is no greater happiness than the realization that there is a Jew walking around Jerusalem because of me. Words cannot describe my feeling of satisfaction."

Shlomo concludes, "I am a regular, normal person, not particularly kind or brave. If more people were aware of the need for living kidney donation, I'm sure there would be another few thousand like me, and thousands of lives would be saved. The sick people need those of us who are blessed with good health. If we would all learn to give of ourselves, the world would certainly be a better place. I think that also up in Heaven such actions are highly valued. G-d has given us a gift and we can use it to save another of His creatures. That's the essence of the matter. I am hopeful that more and more people will become exposed to the publicity of Matnat Chaim, just as I was, and decide to take the step, to save a life, and to find happiness."

In Hashem's Hands: A Kidney Transplant and a Dream Fulfilled

The story of Simone Schachter

Chazal tell us that in the way a man wants to go, he will be led (Makkos 10b). When Simone Schachter saw an advertisement looking for a kidney donor, she immediately knew she wanted to do it. The only thing she didn't know was just how amazing - and quick - it would all be. The saying of chazal was fulfilled, and along with it, her dream.

Malka Winner

A Dream Is Born

Simone Schachter describes herself as just an ordinary woman from Edgware, a London suburb, who has been blessed with good health. She leaves out the part about her extraordinarily kind and caring heart. "I saw an advert back in 2012 for someone looking for a kidney with an A blood type, but it didn't work out," she recalls.

Although that particular situation didn't develop, it ignited a spark within her, and she knew that donating



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a kidney was something she wanted to do. "I had just turned 64 and wanted to give soon, before it was too late," Simone explains matter-of-factly, as if urgently desiring to donate a kidney is the most natural thing in the world.

Resolved to do it straight away, Simone contacted the Matnat Chaim organization in Israel but soon learned she would need to go to Israel for at least several weeks. A short time later, on Chol Hamoed Sukkos 5776 (2015), Simone saw another advertisement. Matnat Chaim was opening a branch in the United Kingdom. She called to request an application the day after Sukkos.

Simone had reached out to Matnat Chaim so quickly that all the legalities had not yet been finalized, but the organization promised to be in touch. Carrying on with her life as a devoted wife, mother and *bubby*, Simone waited patiently, hoping - and *davening* - that she would merit to do this mitzvah that resonated so deeply within her.

The Vision Becomes Reality

On January 14th, 2016, Simone got the call from Dr. Judith Abrahams of Matnat Chaim UK: it was all-systems go. A recipient had been found - a man in his early 70s, who was suffering through a grueling dialysis schedule three times a week, five and a half hours at a shot. He had practically been chained to the dialysis machine for the past 14 months, barely able to eat anything, with no quality of life - and was still working throughout, trying to keep things up and running for his wife and children. He was *alive*, but was not *living*. Simone sought and received the brachos of *Rabbanim* and several *Gedolei Yisrael*.

"We were desperate," recalls the recipient's wife, Debbie*. "Dialysis ruins your life. We had heard about Matnat Chaim, and we thought that there was no chance we could get in - but I had to try. I flew to Israel and met Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber, the founder of Matnat Chaim. He had gone through the same experience as us and was willing to help."

Meanwhile, Simone felt the excitement of one who had received a tremendous gift - even though *she* was the one doing the giving. With her husband's blessings and his love and support through her many appointments, Simone began the process. "Matnat Chaim wanted me to meet the recipient," she remembers. "We met his wife, Debbie, first and just connected immediately. The following week we met Gabriel. It was very emotional."

The recipient's wife, Debbie, said about Simone, "It was love at first sight. And not only that, Simone thanked *us* for helping her fulfill her dream." The meeting solidified things even more for Simone. "I felt that though he [Gabriel] was on the transplant list, the chances of his being offered a kidney were low. He had kidney failure, he was in his seventies; this was his chance."

Though her husband was very ill and had many of his own appointments to go to, Debbie Cohen still wanted to be involved with the Schachers throughout Simone's approval process. She came along to her appointments, offering her friendship and moral support throughout. "Of course, every time I would say thank you, Simone would say, 'I haven't done anything yet!' I always told her, 'Even if you change your mind, I'll always stay your friend.' She was a real *tzadikah*."

Simone's husband, Meir, also faithfully accompanied her through the testing phase at the Royal Free Hospital in London, which is renowned for its excellent track record and expertise in transplants. There she underwent blood checks, an x-ray, an ECG, a CT scan, a kidney scan and other tests. It was a lot to take in, yet Simone did it with aplomb, feeling that Hashem was holding her hand through it all. And when her results all came back good, Simone had to meet with a surgeon who went through the details of the procedure. Everything he said came with warnings, caveats, negative possibilities, potential consequences - and with the constant reminder that she could back out at any time.

"At this appointment," Simone remembers, "I asked the surgeon if he would let his own mother go through the procedure. He said yes. There was no way I would back out - not after meeting Gabriel and Debbie and their children, none of whom are married yet. I wanted him to be able to live to see them married off, and at the right time, to know the joy of grandchildren." A mother and grandmother several times over, Simone understands what those blessings are and she wanted the Cohens to experience them, too. Not only that, so did her kids. "My sons, Yaakov and Chaim, and daughters-in-law, Malki and Devory, were all very supportive," she says.

Throughout the process, which included more tests on both the donor and the recipient to check for complete compatibility, the Schachers spoke every day with the Cohens. Then came the assessment panel, where Simone had to meet a psychologist who was seeking to verify that she did indeed know what she was doing, what she was getting into, that she was mentally and emotionally healthy and that she was really going through with this for altruistic reasons.

Simone just kept in mind that this is something she wanted to do. Vizhnitzer Chassidim, the Schachers were full of *emunah* -- and *simchah* -- that not only was Hashem running the show, He would guide them in just the right way. Everything had worked out with all the tests. Everything matched up for the donor and recipient. She felt the gift of real *hashgachah pratis*.

Before she knew it, Simone was signing consent forms

and the transplant was scheduled: It was to be on Rosh Chodesh Tammuz 5777, July 6th, 2016, just five short months from when the process started.

A Circle of Giving

The day of the surgery, Simone went into the hospital happy, self-assured and smiling. Ever practical, she told herself that if, *chas veshalom*, something would have been wrong with one of her kidneys, of course she would have gone through with a procedure to have it removed. “It’s really the same thing,” she says, explaining, “To get to 64 and to be able to do this – I feel I’ve received a gift and I wanted to share it. I have no needle phobia. I’m in good health. There was no reason not to.” One can hear the smile in her voice as she adds, “And if I had a third kidney, I’d do it again!”

Rabbi and Mrs. Heber and Dr. Judith Abrahams of Matnat Chaim flew in from Israel to be with the Schachters and the Cohens throughout the procedure, to give them support and help them through the surgery and post-op recovery. “They gave us so much confidence,” Gabriel recalls.

The Ezra U’Marpeh organization stocked the hospital with everything the families would need during the week and provided Shabbos meals and supplies “with all the trimmings.” The staff at the Royal Free were also amazing and very accommodating to all the Schachters’ and the Cohens’ needs. They were “truly wonderful,” Gabriel says.

Gabriel recollects how right before the operation Simone’s husband brought them two letters she had written to the Cohens, to be given to them while she was undergoing her surgery and before Gabriel went for his.

Simone’s husband then reiterated how happy and excited – and extraordinarily thankful – she was to be taking part in this. It was very hard for Gabriel to accept such a huge gift, but, as he says, “Simone



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No more dialysis!

was simply marvelous – and the Hebers and Mrs. Judith Abrahams were so supportive, both medically and emotionally.”

“Simone was so caring and kind,” Debbie recalls. “She gave us energy. And she refused to take anything from us – not even hand cream. She wanted to do it all for the sake of the mitzvah.” There were a few hiccups with both their recoveries, but, *baruch Hashem*, everything resolved.

Indeed, after meeting with Simone, the head of the psychological evaluation panel told Simone, “I’ve never met a more enthusiastic donor.” The Cohens remember how the hospital was just amazed that a complete stranger would want to go through all this just to give to a fellow Jew - *kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh* (*all Jews are responsible for one another*). The first Jewish woman to complete an altruistic donation in London, Simone made a tremendous *Kiddush Hashem*. In fact, one of the doctors involved wanted to implement something like this in his church, after witnessing this beautiful story. “They got a lot of admiration and became role models,” the Cohens say.

But the biggest difference Simone made was to Gabriel Cohen and his family. “We are hoping to share all our *simchos* together,” they say. “We are so thankful to Matnat Chaim and the Schachters. Simone saved not just one life. She saved five.”

Bonds of Gratitude

Simone’s calm, down-to-earth demeanor makes it sound so easy. She’s a person who exudes warmth and giving, saying over and over again, “I really, really felt like Hashem was with me every step of the way. Everything just happened so quickly, it all worked out, it all came back okay. I felt it just must be from Hashem. It couldn’t be any other way.”

Those thoughts kept her confident throughout – along with the pure joy of doing a mitzvah like this just for the sake of giving. But she wasn’t even doing it for the sake of *sechar mitzvah* - the Heavenly reward she will surely receive. After all, she says at least half of that is going to her dear husband, Meir, for all his support and loving-kindness throughout.

It was an emotional ride for both families, who hail from



Donor Simone Schachter’s greatest supporters - (left to right) son Yaaakov, husband Meir and son Chaim

very different backgrounds, but are now bonded for life. The children of the two families met each other, and the Schachters’ two wonderful sons walked over two hours from the Stamford Hill neighborhood to be with their parents on Shabbos day. Meanwhile the Cohens’ daughters had prepared special letters of gratitude for the Schachters. “Each sentence was more beautiful than the next. I challenge anyone to read them without crying,” Meir Schachter says, adding, “It was all just such a special, wonderful experience.”

And when he speaks about his wife’s great mitzvah, he gets emotional. “My wife always says I’ve got 50 percent of her mitzvah. Let me tell you, if I even have 1 percent I would be so honored.”

“I’m so, so happy I did it,” Simone says. Speaking about Cohens, she says, “I just want them to get their lives back together. No one knows why we go through tests, but if I have helped them in theirs, I am so very grateful. And I am so appreciative of Matnat Chaim. If they wouldn’t have been there, I wouldn’t have been able to fulfill my dream.”

Today the Schachters share a special connection with the

Cohens, and Simone and Debbie speak every day. “I’ve had a lot of lovely feedback,” she says. “This has been with *simchah* from the beginning to the end.” Gabriel adds, “Words cannot express our gratitude to Simone and her family. They are like a dream. Everything was amazing, everything connected so well.”

Working against her nature, Simone has gone on to publicly share her experience – in gratitude for the gift she felt she was given, and in the hope that she will inspire others to give. “You simply can’t understand the suffering of dialysis patients,” she says.

Gabriel adds, “We become close to the people we do dialysis with – we sat together for five and a half hours at a time. I just hope my dialysis mates will be able to find a donor like mine.” The dialysis had been so long and so taxing that Gabriel and his family felt a shock when it was suddenly all over. “I still can’t believe it. Life has completely changed.”

*The recipient and his wife are using pseudonyms.

MATNAT CHAIM GOES TRULY INTERNATIONAL!

A three-country undertaking

A family in Europe recently appealed to Rabbi Heber of Matnat Chaim in Israel to help their relative who had kidney failure and was due to begin dialysis in the near future.

Matnat Chaim UK, run by Dr. Judith Abrahams, had a suitable potential donor in Manchester on its books. This donor, a very motivated lady aged 43, mother of six and grandmother of three was one of the very first people to register with Matnat Chaim when the Israeli organization started to operate in the UK in 2015. She said she felt she was doing her duty by registering but never imagined it would actually happen!

Some of the pre-donation slew of medical tests were carried out in Manchester and some in the European hospital. There were myriad logistical issues involved in arranging the tests (and sometimes repeat tests) both in Manchester and in Europe, and Matnat Chaim was very fortunate in locating dedicated medical *askanim* (activists) in both places whose help in making all the arrangements was invaluable.

The donor flew to Europe three times in all. On her first visit blood testing was done and she was found to be a match. The second time was for further medical and psychological tests, and then finally she arrived for the transplant itself.

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FREEDOM!
No more dialysis!

A Third Partner: A Conversation with a Kidney Donor Coordinator

Malka Winner

The recipient and the donor are the main partners in a transplant, but there are many others involved, too. Meet Bethan Hood of the Royal Free Hospital in London, United Kingdom, where Matnat Chaim UK has facilitated two altruistic kidney transplants in recent months.

Hi, Bethan. Would you please tell us about your role in the hospital and with the donor and recipient?

I am a clinical nurse specialist. My role as a living kidney donor coordinator involves assessing potential donors and coordinating their care. I accompany them through this process from the initial visit right through the work-up process – and I care for them after they have donated.

How does “the list” work for those who are waiting for kidney transplants? How many are waiting?

The waiting list works on a points-based system. We use an algorithm to determine who gets which kidney – this formula include variables such as length of time on the waiting list and the particular difficulty in finding a match (due to the presence of a lot of antibodies against the general population - what we call “highly sensitized”). Children get priority on the waiting list. And, of course, the aim is to get the best possible match for each recipient. There are 5,500 people in the United Kingdom waiting for a kidney. Last year, 282 people passed away while on the active or suspended¹ waiting list.



What is the volume of kidney transplants handled in the Royal Free in an average year? What kind of transplants are they?

We do about 130-140 transplants a year. Of those, 35-40 are from living donors. On average, three to five of those living donations are made by altruistic donors.

What's the reason people usually consider becoming living donors?

Many people do it to help a family member or close friend - or even a complete stranger - on the transplant waiting list. People - especially older altruistic donors - often feel fortunate that they have lived a good life, have children and grandchildren, and they want to give something back to others, to allow the recipient of their kidney a chance of a normal life.

When a person gets a donated kidney, their quality of life is restored. They're free from the limitations imposed on them by having kidney failure and all that that involves. And people who receive living donations generally have better outcomes than those who don't.

¹ Being on the suspended list means that a potential recipient will not be offered a transplant at the present time. A person is usually put on the suspended list when he or she is ill and will not be fit for a transplant for a period of time or if the person travels far enough away that he or she wouldn't be able to reach the renal unit in time to do the transplant, should a kidney become available.

What can a potential donor expect before and after donating a kidney?

There is a rigorous work-up process, along with ample opportunities for asking questions, gathering information and more. Donors will need to travel to our hospital on a minimum of four occasions for various tests and consultations. They will also need to take time off work to recover - and they need to be aware that they may not receive sick pay for this.²

Potential donors are told that they can pull out of the process at any stage. This is reinforced at each visit, although last-minute changes of mind are rare. Donors' physical, mental and emotional health will be thoroughly assessed, and they will receive full counselling, too, about the potential risks and long-term outcomes. We develop a sense of each donor's motivation and circumstances throughout the process.

Following the donation, donors are recommended to have life-long medical follow-up. We run annual review clinics at which we check the donor's kidney function, do a blood-pressure check and cover lifestyle issues, such as diet and exercise.

What kind of long-term risks are involved for kidney donors?

Studies have been conducted to determine the long-term effects of living with one kidney. Donors are at a slightly increased risk of elevated blood pressure and having excess protein in their urine compared with the general population.

The long-term risk of donors developing kidney failure is roughly the same as the general population. I personally haven't had a donor who ended up needing a kidney later on.

What kind of feedback do you hear from donors?

Donors often report a sense of satisfaction from helping someone. Or, if someone donates to his or her spouse, the donor can regain a normal family life and is able to make plans for the future, as things are often put on hold. Every donor is different - all are special.

² The U.K.'s NHS (National Health Service) has a reimbursement policy whereby donors can claim travel costs and loss of earnings, provided they have the proper documentation to support their claim.



The Misery of Surviving on Dialysis



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No more dialysis!

While dialysis does save lives of individuals suffering from kidney disease that has destroyed the functioning capability of both kidneys, the achievement of survival alone is rarely associated with an improvement in the quality of life. Quite often, in fact, the reverse holds true. Dialysis is an attempt at imitating the function of the human kidney. However, it is associated with a markedly reduced survival as compared to healthy individuals. Additionally, those on dialysis suffer from a drastically impaired quality of life, most accomplishing nothing more than surviving.

There are two types of dialysis.

With hemodialysis, blood is pumped out of the body to an artificial kidney machine including a device with a membrane which acts as a filter.

In peritoneal dialysis the inside lining of the peritoneum is used as a natural filter and the procedure is sufficiently safe to be performed by the individual in the comfort of his own home.

In both circumstances, an operation must be performed either to establish an arteriovenous (connection between artery and vein) fistula or to place a catheter in a large central vein in hemodialysis patients or to insert a peritoneal cavity catheter in peritoneal dialysis patients.

Hemodialysis is the most common form of dialysis, and is normally performed in dedicated outpatient centers. During the procedure, the patient's blood is pumped from his body through the dialysis machine through a special membrane that allows the filtering of toxins from the blood. Hemodialysis treatments are generally rapid lasting 3 to 4 hours as opposed to the human kidney that performs a similar action over the course of 2 days. Since the process is rapid the patients tend to feel exhausted and weakened by the treatments.

Peritoneal dialysis is a much slower process but no more successful than hemodialysis. Hemodialysis is generally performed three times a week with the patient tethered to the machine for four hours or more each time and virtually immobilized. Peritoneal dialysis is an ongoing process and is performed daily either during ambulation or at night.

There are many side effects of both types of dialysis and residual poor function of the kidneys that remain without effective treatment. These include daily

complaints by patients of nausea and vomiting, low blood pressure, dry or itchy skin, headaches, confusion, irregular heartbeat, restless leg syndrome and muscle cramping. Muscle cramping, in particular can cause extreme discomfort to many patients.

A dialysis patient relates: "My neighbor on the right of me in the dialysis unit was generally silent during the dialysis sessions. Except, that is, when I heard him groaning in the agony from leg cramps. I had noticed that he held a small white cloth in his hand. I didn't know what it was for until he began to writhe silently in the first stages of his cramps. He had been through this before and therefore had prepared himself. In the distant past doctors would give their patients a cloth to bite down on while surgery was performed without anesthesia. This was the first time in my life that I actually witnessed a man muffle his own screams with a cloth in his mouth."

Aside from the trauma of dialysis itself, many aspects of the dialysis patient's life are also extremely difficult. Many types of foods are strictly forbidden because of the need to restrict the intakes of sodium, potassium and phosphorus. Thus amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables are restricted. Whole-wheat products are similarly proscribed in order to limit the daily intake of phosphorus. It is therefore no wonder that dialysis patients typically complain that any healthy food is forbidden to them!

A dietician who works with dialysis patients relates: "When I give them the special dialysis diet, they cry and I cry with them."

<<< Continued from page 22

This transplant caused quite a sensation in the European hospital as they had no previous experience of altruistic kidney donation; all their previous transplants had been from family members or cadavers. The very senior surgeon, who operated on both the donor and the recipient, noted that in his institution more than 4500 kidney transplant procedures had been performed over a period of 50 years and yet this was the very first purely altruistic transplant!

In the words of the local transplant coordinator, "It's amazing that a stranger flew in from England to donate – but you are not really strangers, are you?" This is even

In the days between dialysis treatments, the body retains much of the excess fluid and waste that the non-functional kidneys are unable to remove. This means that the fluid intake is often greatly restricted. Even on the hottest summer's day, a dialysis patient may be limited to one or two cups of water a day. The craving for water can become so desperate that a child on dialysis will often attempt to drink his bathwater. Many patients eke out their permitted water allotment literally drop by drop in order to draw out their permitted amounts for as long as possible.

Other complications of dialysis include the risk of infection - especially for those on peritoneal dialysis - and blocked arteriovenous fistulas on hemodialysis.

Most patients require dialysis three times a week, but even on the remaining days they do not succeed in living a normal life. As soon as they have begun to recover slightly from the previous treatment the debilitating process starts all over again. Every day becomes either one of dialysis or a day recovering from dialysis. Patients' families suffer as well, as no normal routine is possible when everything in life must revolve around dialysis.

Furthermore, the prognosis is bleak as about 20% of dialysis patients die every year.

It is little wonder that just hearing the word "dialysis" is enough to make all the color drain from a kidney patient's face.

truer than she could have imagined because when the donor and recipient eventually met and played "Jewish geography" it turned out that their grandfathers were in the same class before the war!

Thank G-d, the transplant was a great success and the recipient was therefore fortunate enough to escape the ordeal of dialysis - due to a 3-country project orchestrated by the dedicated staff of Matnat Chaim!

“Take for me a donation from everyone whose heart impels him to give ...”



One hundred and thirty altruistic kidney donors and their spouses gathered to spend Shabbat *Parshat Terumah* together, with the participation of senior representatives of the medical establishment. Note that *teruma* means a donation or an offering and so the choice of Shabbat was particularly appropriate. The atmosphere was amazing, truly uplifting.

“Donating a kidney has enriched and strengthened me. As a donor, I feel that I received more than I gave,” says Benny Aibes 56, a kidney donor. Indeed, one hears countless statements like this from these remarkable people.

The Chief Rabbi of Israel, HaGaon HaRav David Lau, went to the trouble of walking over on Shabbat to the hotel, in order to express his admiration and appreciation to the kidney donors.

Shabbat Kodesh, Parshat Terumah, 4 Adar Aleph, 2016

The date was highlighted on the calendar, and for weeks, the excitement had been building up. I knew that this was going to be a Shabbat like no other I'd ever experienced. I didn't realize how right I was.

The amazing atmosphere struck me as we approached the lobby of the Ramada Hotel in Jerusalem. At the entrance, welcoming signs awaited us, while Rabbi Heber and his gracious wife stood close by, greeting each couple warmly with a personal touch derived from their close involvement with each couple and their unique story: the husband and wife who each donated a kidney in the course of the same week; the teacher who used her sabbatical to donate a kidney to a child; the senior faculty member of the Michlala in Jerusalem who donated a kidney to a recipient with 100% antibodies; the avrech who donated a kidney to someone who, it transpired, was actually an old friend from the past. And there were many more people - all with their own special stories. On the other side of the lobby sat the Matnat Chaim personnel, taking down details and presenting each donor with a gift. My eyes filled with tears (and I wasn't the only one) as I looked around me at the amazing scene: dozens of people, the 'crème de la crème', kind, compassionate people with the desire to make the world a better, more loving and more accepting place.

Later that day, the guests gathered to greet Shabbat



FREEDOM!
No more dialysis!

Rabbi Hillel Paley. Softly, Rabbi Paley began to play the song "Ochilolo'el...I shall put my hope in G-d" and when they reached the words "Le'odom ma'archei lev... it is for man to arrange his feelings, but eloquent speech is a G-dly gift", the atmosphere was electrified as everyone sang with fervor.

Afterwards, it was time to light candles. I davened for our own kidney recipient, a mother of two small children, imploring Hashem to grant her a long life of good health.

After a moving Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma'ariv, we all proceeded to the dining room for our Shabbat meal.

Later, when the men danced around the tables in a never-ending circle, I thought my heart would burst with emotion. Who would have believed that we are connected with all this???? If only there were more such circles, more such inspirational occasions. I am so proud to be part of a group like this.

The atmosphere was uplifting and moving, and when Rabbi Heber spoke about the Matnat Chaim family, we all sensed that we were part of a unique human mosaic, totally dedicated to making sacrifices for the good of others.

We were especially moved when the father of Pinchas Turgeman spoke.

Pinchas, aged 21, was undergoing dialysis after having lost his transplanted kidney shortly after the death of his brother, who had been killed fighting terrorists. He met Rabbi Heber in the dialysis unit, where Rabbi Heber was himself undergoing treatment. A firm friendship developed between the two, but while Rabbi Heber received a donated kidney, Pinchas was still waiting for a suitable donor. Rabbi Heber eventually found him a donor but just before the scheduled

R. N.
wife of a
kidney donor

transplant, Pinchas suddenly passed away. Driven by the pain he felt for the loss of his young friend and the knowledge that people can easily be spared such tragedy, Rabbi Heber established the Matnat Chaim organization.

There wasn't a dry eye in the room as Pinchas' father expressed how moved he was to see the tremendous project that had been established in memory of his only two sons. In tears, he described the deep joy that was surely reigning in Heaven as a result of this gathering of people who personify altruistic human goodness. He was also the only one present who described the other side of the coin, recalling the pain, low quality of life and tremendous suffering experienced by dialysis patients and stressing the



Rabbi Hillel Paley greeting Shabbat HaMalka in song

amazing life-saving act of each and every donor.

After the meal, a symposium was held, chaired by Rabbi Moshe Ravitz, with the participation of Chief Rabbi HaGaon HaRav David Lau, Knesset Member Rabbi Yoav Ben-Tzur and Dr. Aharon Bloch, a nephrology specialist from Hadassah Hospital, who together enriched our knowledge regarding halachic, medical and legal aspects of kidney donations.

On Shabbat day, kidney donors themselves spoke movingly, thanking Rabbi Heber for the great zechut (merit) he had given them and for his constant help and support. They related experiences they had undergone and compared lessons they had learned.

It was such a powerful Shabbat. I didn't want this

indescribable, intoxicating feeling to end. We met people from all walks of life, young and old, Chassidish and Litvish, charedim and national religious, and even two non-observant Jews. Most of them had families and some were even grandparents.

The overriding impression that I gained as I spoke with donors was their intense happiness at being able to be part of this incredible experience and to make a difference!

After Shabbat went out, the donors all gathered for an enormous family photo – the Matnat Chaim family - a huge family with one thing in common - all with only one kidney!



Knesset Member Rabbi Yoav Ben-Tzur (L)
with Rabbi Heber

I gazed at this special family and an incredible feeling of happiness flooded over me – joy at belonging to such a special, loving family and anticipation that, next year, this wonderful family will have grown and added to its ranks more amazing people.

Key Milestones in the History of Matnat Chaim

Since its founding in 2009, almost four hundred people in Israel have voluntarily donated kidneys through the organization Matnat Chaim.

Some important milestones:

In 2014, the former President of the State of Israel, the late Shimon Peres, presented the Presidential Volunteer Medal for 2014 to Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber, the founder and Chairman of Matnat Chaim, honoring his work in the field of altruistic kidney donation.



In 2016, in the Knesset, the Health Minister, Rabbi Yaakov Litzman presented Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber, the founder and Chairman of Matnat Chaim, with the Health Minister's Shield for exemplary volunteerism. See page 13.



In early 2016, under the auspices of Matnat Chaim, one hundred and thirty altruistic kidney donors and their spouses gathered to spend Shabbat Parshat Terumah together. See pages 26-29.



On May 31, 2016 a gathering in recognition of kidney donors and honoring Matnat Chaim took place in the Knesset.

And most significantly-in 2016 alone **over 120 people donated a kidney via Matnat Chaim!** These numbers keep growing from year to year (e.g. 33 in 2013, 49 in 2014 and 88 in 2015), a trend that will hopefully continue.

FREEDOM!
No more dialysis!

You can't donate a kidney? Help us find someone who can Kidney Donations Save Lives. So Do Monetary Donations.

Matnat Chaim has recruited almost 400 volunteers who donated their kidneys and saved almost 400 lives. But even if you can't donate a kidney, you can partner with Matnat Chaim to save the lives of kidney patients.

Your donation will support programs aimed at achieving kidney transplants, for example:

- The average cost of finding one kidney donor until a successful transplant is completed = \$6000 (~£4700)
- To sponsor an informative magazine (like this one) in English = \$30,000 (~£23,500)
- To sponsor a wide-circulation informative magazine in Hebrew= \$60,000 (~£47,000)

Every donation however small brings us closer to the next kidney transplant.

How to donate from your country:

	ISRAEL	USA	UK/Europe
Credit card		https://secured.israelgives.org/donate/matnat/	
Phone	*2716	1-888970-4608	0800-0488276 (UK only)
Check with tax exemption	Make check out to: Matnat Chaim Mail to: Kanfei Nesharim 15 Box 90 Jerusalem, Israel 9546427	Make check out to: PEF Israel Endowment Fund In an accompanying note, request that the donation be allocated to Matnat Chaim #580506889 Mail to: PEF 630 Third Avenue, Ste. 1501 New York, NY 10017 Tel 212-599-1260	(UK only) Make check out to: UK Gives In an accompanying note, request that the donation be allocated to Matnat Chaim #580506889 Mail to: UK Gives 483 Green Lanes London, England N134BS Tel: 07874400651
Bank Transfer	Tax Exempt! For: Matnat Chaim Bank Mercantile, branch 661 17/661/62951787 Please notify by email: judy.matnac@gmail.com	Tax exempt! For: PEF Israel Endowment Fund ABA# 026009768 Account # 03-2693-2 MUST notify by email: info@pefisrael.org - noting date and amount of transfer and request it be allocated to Matnat Chaim #580506889	Mercantile Discount Bank Ltd. Kanfei Nesharim Branch SWIFT code: BARDILXXX IBAN number: IL10 0176 6100 0006 2951 787 Please notify by email: judy.matnac@gmail.com

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You have finished
reading this supplement

FREEDOM - no more dialysis! and now you have 3 opportunities:

1. Contact Matnat Chaim to
enquire about donating a
kidney (no obligation!)

2. Donate money to help us
find the next kidney donor -
for details see page 31

3. Pass this supplement on to
your friends to spread the
word about kidney donation

Any of these opportunities will help grant freedom to dialysis patients, PG.

SPONSORED IN MEMORY OF OUR BELOVED PARENTS o.b.m.

PAUL AND MARTA GROSS

AND

DAVID BESSIAH

BY MICHAEL AND DANIELLE GROSS

Sponsored in honor of my kidney donor

Simone

"Many daughters have done valiantly, but you surpassed them all"
With boundless gratitude

Sponsored in honor of Matnat Chaim

MENACHEMS

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Golders Green, London, UK