

RENEWAL TORONTO SAYS: "Donate A Kidney And Save A Life"

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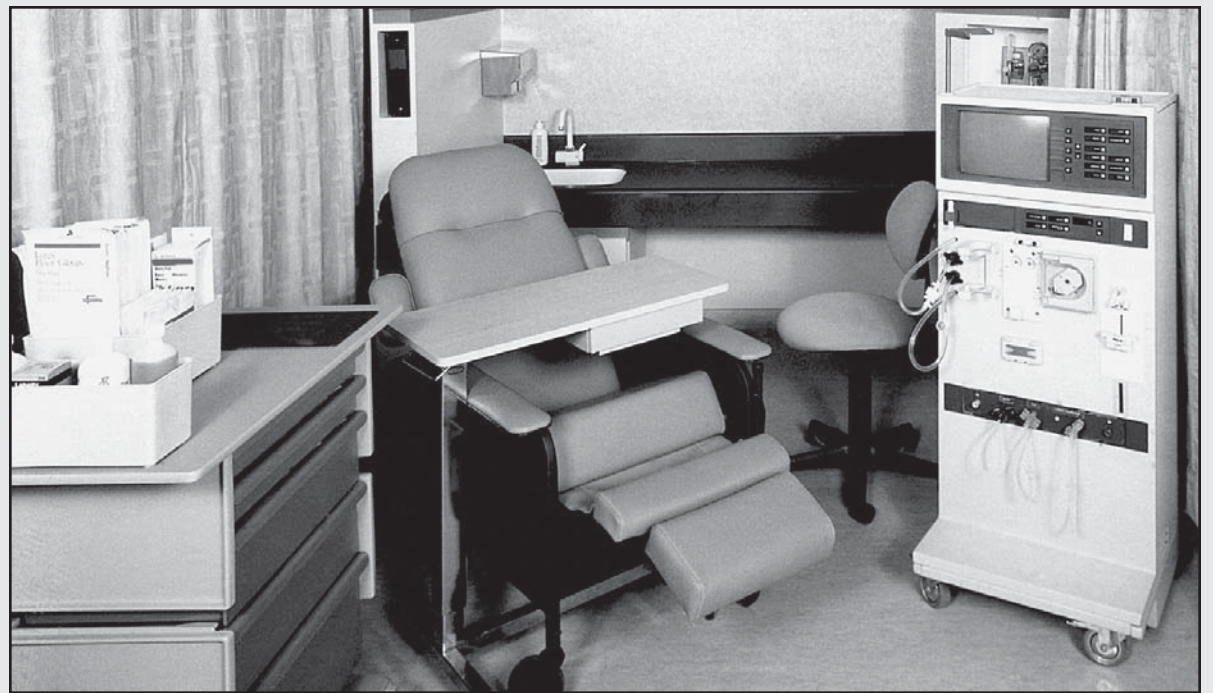
The Jewish community of Toronto is fortunate to have a new chessed organization in its midst - Renewal Toronto. Renewal Toronto's mission is to assist people suffering from various forms of kidney disease. Kidney disease is a chronic disease, which can be debilitating and even fatal unless the patient receives a kidney through a kidney transplant. Renewal helps these patients by finding someone to donate a kidney to them. Once Renewal finds someone to donate a kidney, it assists the donor in any way possible as the donor performs this beautiful chessed, the very special mitzvah of hatzalos nefashos, saving the life of a fellow Jew.

Renewal Toronto, which was started here just after last Rosh Hashanah, is a branch of Renewal which is based in New York. Renewal New York itself was launched just three years ago, and in those three short years it has dramatically increased the awareness of kidney disease and kidney donation in the Jewish community, particularly in the New York and New Jersey areas. To date it has acted as shadchan in arranging twenty-seven donations from a donor to a recipient who were previously unknown to each other, and has assisted in many more kidney donations from relatives and friends. Over the past six months Renewal New York has received lots of publicity through articles in Hamodia magazine, Hamodia newspaper, Five Towns Jewish Times, and other sources.

The launch of Renewal Toronto is good news to a 23-year old Toronto bochur called Yaacov (name changed to protect privacy). When he was seventeen years old, Yaacov was diagnosed with a rare kidney disease called membranous nephropathy. Doctors do not know the cause of this disease, and there is no known cure. The doctors told Yaacov that his kidneys would fail over a period of twenty years, and that he would then need a kidney transplant. But his kidneys deteriorated much faster than the doctors predicted, and right after Succos three-and-a-half years ago, when he was home in Toronto from yeshiva in Israel for Yom Tov, his kidneys failed completely and he had to go on dialysis. Dialysis is a treatment whereby a person is hooked up to a machine that filters the waste out of their blood because their kidneys are no able to filter the waste out of their blood. Yaacov currently has to undergo dialysis five times every week, for eight hours each time. In addition, he has suffered complications from the dialysis which have required emergency surgeries and other medical procedures. So today Yaacov is in urgent need of a kidney donation. Although Yaacov tries to lead a normal life, his kidney disease has an enormous effect on him and his family. Yaacov's desire is to eventually lead a normal life, get married, and build a family. Renewal Toronto is currently working to find a donor for Yaacov.

Fortunately, kidney donation is not something new to Toronto's frum community. Recently there have been at least three cases of a local Yid donating a kidney to save another Yid's life. These donations have been approved and blessed by leading local rabbis. Last summer, a local husband donated a kidney to his wife. In September, a local man traveled to New York to donate a kidney to a man from Jerusalem, and in November, a local woman donated a kidney to a long-time friend of hers. The story of another kidney donation within the Toronto frum community was written about by Rabbi Pesach Krohn in one of his books.

In Canada and the US, if someone is suffering from kidney disease and requires a kidney donation, their doctor sends them to a hospital transplant department where they are put on a waiting list. It usually takes between three and eight years on the waiting list until one receives a kidney. In the meantime the patient usually needs to be on dialysis multiple times per week. This takes many hours each time, and involves pain, inconvenience, loss



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of livelihood, weakness, risk of complications, as well as various implications for the person's family. Dialysis does not filter the blood nearly as well as real kidneys, and worst of all, it is a temporary solution, a stopgap measure that cannot sustain the body forever. Every year in North America thousands of people, or eight percent of the people on the waiting lists, die while on dialysis, waiting for a kidney to become available. Renewal Toronto estimates that there are 20-30 Jews in Toronto today who are in need of a kidney.

People on the list can get a kidney faster by finding someone to donate a kidney to them. The obvious first choice is a family member. Frequently though, this is not possible. The relative might not be the right blood type, might not be in good enough health, might also suffer from or be prone to kidney disease, might have genetic factors which disqualify them, or might be unable to for other reasons. Sometimes family members are hesitant about donating because they don't know what is involved in donating a kidney. For example, many people are unaware that after a person donates a kidney, they are typically able to return to their full slate of regular activities after 2-4 weeks. Thereafter they are not restricted by the lack of a kidney, and they have a normal life expectancy. This is because people are born with two kidneys, and when one is removed, amazingly the remaining one grows in size and filters all of the person's blood. If a relative is not available to donate, people requiring a kidney could turn to their friends, but most patients don't want to publicize their illness, and besides, how does one go to a friend and say "What blood type are you? What is your medical history? Will you give me one of your kidneys?" Even if a friend is willing to donate, they might not be able to for the same reasons as family sometimes cannot donate. So many patients cannot get a kidney from family or friends, and they have no choice but to suffer and wait, and pray and hope.

Donating a kidney to a person in need is clearly a case of hatzalos nefashos, saving a person's life. It is truly a very special mitzvah. In fact, many donors claim that donating a kidney is one of the most special, rewarding, and meaningful experiences of their lives. For some doctors and other medical professionals hatzalos nefashos might be part of a regular day's work. For a selfless Hatzalah responder, it's a mitzvah that can present itself at any time of night or day. But for the rest of us, it's not a mitzvah

opportunity that presents itself in the normal course of life. If you are potentially interested in doing this mitzvah, how do you go about researching kidney donation, making an informed decision, and finding the right recipient?

Renewal helps patients by finding people in the community who are interested in doing this incredible chessed for another Jew. Renewal does this by providing reliable information about kidney donation to potential donors, without any pressure or expectations. Renewal also has past donors available who are willing to tell potential donors about their experience and about what is involved. If and when a person decides to become a donor, Renewal helps them all along the way - during medical testing to see if they are healthy enough, during pre-op to know what to expect, and throughout their recovery period. Renewal also offers financial support to donors by reimbursing them for any expenses that they incur (such as transportation, babysitting, and meals), and by reimbursing them for any lost wages that they experience during the process of donating a kidney.

Renewal helps kidney disease sufferers by working to find them a donor. Renewal does this through various means such as articles in local publications, signs in shuls, and public lectures such as one that was held in Thornhill during Chanukah. As part of its chessed, Renewal does not ask patients for any payment or reimbursement at any point in the donation process. Renewal can afford to do this because it is supported by donations and staffed by volunteers.

Currently Renewal Toronto is looking for donors for three people - for Yaacov as described above, for a man in Toronto, and for a woman in London, Ontario. If you are interested in helping Yaacov or another patient and would like to learn more about donating a kidney, and you are in good health, please contact Renewal Toronto at telephone (416) 628-7633 or visit www.renewal.org

Thanks to Renewal in New York, in three short years kidney donation has gone from being almost unheard-of to being a well-known and increasingly-common act of chessed. Renewal Toronto aims to accomplish the same thing here. Renewal Toronto's dream and goal is that any Jew who is need of a kidney transplant should be able to get one within six months. With the participation of the community, this dream can become a reality.