

Matnat Chaim – Giving the Gift of Life

About a month ago, a historic event occurred in the Royal Free Hospital, Hampstead – the first altruistic kidney transplant to take place in the UK with a third party making the match. Under the auspices of Matnat Chaim, an Israeli charity which encourages and facilitates voluntary kidney donation, donor Stephen Colman (aged 64) of Golders Green gave one of his kidneys to Philip Walters of Southend.

Stephen Colman takes up the story, explaining that he first considered donating a kidney about five years ago, when the mother of a young woman in need of a kidney advertised for a donor. At the time altruistic donation, when there is no family relationship or existing friendship between the people involved, was not possible in the UK. So the Colmans met with the other family and struck up a friendship. Mr. Colman underwent various tests, but his kidney was not compatible with the young woman. The two families remained in contact and the Colmans were delighted when a donor was found in Israel, through Matnat Chaim. As a token of gratitude, the recipient's family brought represen-

tatives of Matnat Chaim to the UK to publicise their work. Mr Colman went to the event and became more determined that he would become a donor.

Matnat Chaim was founded by Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber, who saw first-hand as a result of his own kidney condition the need for more easily available and quicker kidney donations. The prime source for these is altruistic donations – generous volunteers who have the desire and ability to save another person's life.

Medical research shows that a living kidney donation carries hardly any risk for the donor and involves a minimum of discomfort as the operation is performed by keyhole surgery. However, for the recipient, the donation is life-changing and often life-saving. Matnat Chaim is run strictly according to *halachah*, and received an approbation from Harav Elyashiv, *zt"l*, who said, "Not only is it permitted but it is a very great *mitzvah*." Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zt"l*, wrote in his *sefer Shulchan Shlomo*, "It is certainly permitted to remove a kidney from a healthy person in order to transplant it to a sick person. This also constitutes the great *mitzvah* of saving a life."



Rabbi Yeshayahu Heber (L), founder and chairman of Matnat Chaim, with Israel's Minister of Health (R) Rabbi Yaakov Litzman. Rabbi Heber recently received the prestigious Health Minister's Shield for outstanding volunteers, in a ceremony in the Knesset.

The work of Matnat Chaim has been recognised by the Israeli Government, who acknowledge its importance in encouraging and facilitating kidney donations. Isra-

el now has one of the highest rates of live kidney donation in the world. Rabbi Heber was awarded the Presidential Volunteer

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Medal 2014 by Israeli President Shimon Peres. This is Israel's most prestigious award in the field of volunteering.

Mr. Colman tried to donate a kidney again another couple of times, but on each occasion, either the recipient found a family donor, or they were not compatible. Last autumn Matnat Chaim suggested that he might be a suitable donor for Mr. Walters. The pair met up and underwent tests which showed that the match was a good one. Mr. Colman discussed the matter with his rav, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Greenberg, who was very supportive. As well as the physical tests, both parties in a living transplant must undergo counselling to cover the psychological and legal issues. –)

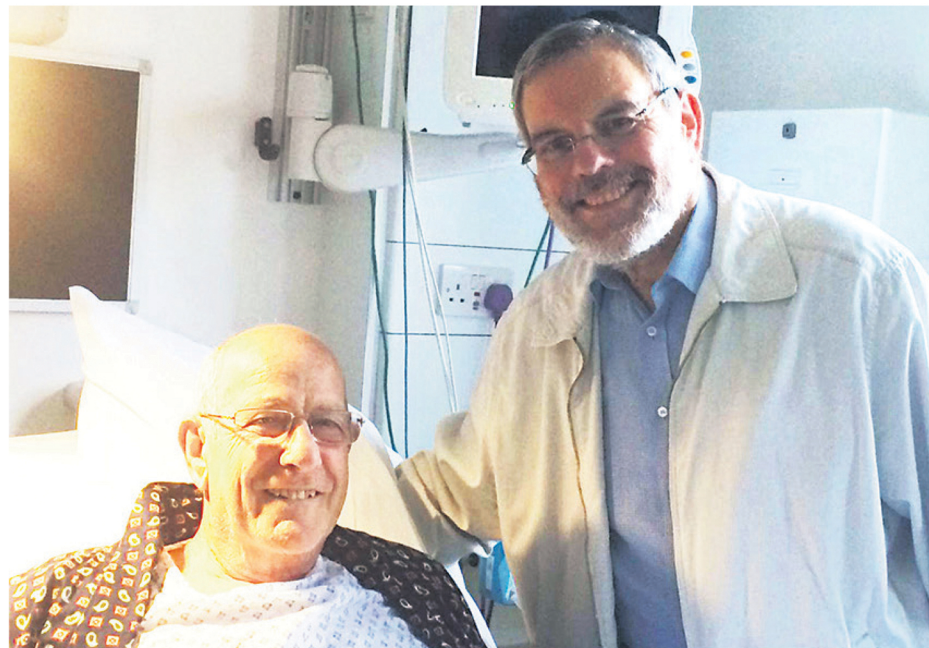
When the day came, each partner in the transplant had their own dedicated surgical team. Mr. Colman's team were very surprised to hear the circumstances of his donation – this was not something that they had encountered before. They were very impressed with Mr. Colman's altruism, creating a Kiddush Hashem. The operation took place on a Wednesday and Mr. Colman was home before Shabbos and able to go to shul on Shabbos morning. He pointed out that the fitter you are, the more smoothly the operation goes and the

quicker the recovery time. A keen cyclist, Mr. Colman had to give up on this year's Kef bike ride as well as his annual London to Brighton bike ride for Norwood, as he was not allowed to drive, cycle or lift heavy weights (including his grandchildren!) for six weeks after the procedure. Once this time has passed, he will be completely back to normal.

Mr Walters, who had been in poor health prior to the transplant, took somewhat longer to recuperate, but is, *b"H*, recovering well and enjoying spending time with his wife and children. The two have remained in close contact, speaking daily. Mr. and Mrs. Colman have visited the Walters on a couple of occasions since the transplant and the two wives have been able to support each other through the procedure.

Mrs Esther Colman told *Hamodia* that originally she was opposed to the idea of her husband donating a kidney as she was very nervous and scared about what it might mean. However, when she met the young woman who was the original potential recipient, she changed her mind. As she said, "How can you stop your husband from doing something so amazing? It's such a good thing to do – so generous and so altruistic."

Matnat Chaim is keen to encourage



Donor Stephen Colman (R) with recipient Philip Walters (L).

other British people to consider donating a kidney and immeasurably improving someone's life. For more information please see the Matnat Chaim website www.kilya.org.il/en or contact them on 0800-

0488276 (UK number), 02-500 0755 (Israel number) or by email on matnatc@gmail.com. Stephen Colman is happy to speak to potential kidney donors and can be contacted via Matnat Chaim.