

# **Donation of Body Organs & Blood\_NO**

## **Can Parsis donate organs or the body after death?**

There is an intensive and ongoing campaign, using high profile stars like Aishwarya Rai, asking people to donate their eyes (cornea) after death. Various associations even send volunteers from house to house asking people to sign up forms which declare their intention to donate their eyes post death. Due to the high incidence of lifestyle diseases there is a long waiting list for people who need various organ transplants, like liver, kidney or even hearts. Also, due to the unavailability of cadavers (whole human bodies) for teaching medical students the art of surgery as well as for research, many institutions are requesting people to donate their entire bodies after death for medical research.

Many Parsis believe that there is nothing wrong in donating various body parts such as the eyes (cornea), kidneys or liver either during life or after death.

They consider such a donation as a great act of charity gaining much merit for them. Several Parsis use the argument that our religion always believes in charity and even the act of putting the body in the Dokhma for the vultures is an act of charity. As such, what is the difference between feeding the body to the vulture and giving the organs to some needy person?

In addition to the levels of religious ignorance being extremely high in our community, there is also an amazing lethargy to find out anything about the religion. Parsis will think of something and then arrive at a decision based on their imperfect (or sometimes complete absence) of understanding of our religion. We are also easily swayed by advertising campaigns or the words of other people who may be high up on the 'social' ladder. Yet they will not ask their own High Priests or learned scholars about these facts.

So does the Zarathushtrian religion allow donation of body parts? The answer is an ABSOLUTE NO. Why? Please read further.

Firstly, one can give away something only if it belongs to oneself. The 70-80 year old life of a human is not to be viewed in isolation. It is a minuscule part of a very long journey undertaken by the Ruvan (more correctly Urvan), 'soul' to reach a state of perfection and unite with its maker Ahura Mazda.

As part of this journey, the Ruvan is given various helpers and aids to enable it to complete its mission in the fastest possible time. The main aid is the Fravashi or Guiding Force which stays with it at all times and tries to guide the Ruvan on to the right path. The other important aid is the Baodangh or Divine Wisdom which keeps on growing as the Ruvan progresses.

As part of its mission, the Ruvan passes through our Earth for a limited time. For this mission, the Ruvan is given a ultra-physical core (known as Keherp) as well as a physical body (known as Tanu). These two aids comprise the physical body as we see it. After a specific time, and as part of the Ruvan's ongoing progress, the physical body loses its ability to regenerate itself. This is known as death (rather the correct term is passing away, since it shows the continuity of the process).

As the Ruvan moves out from its physical shell to begin its further onward journey, it is necessary that the aids given to it in this lifetime (namely the physical body and the ultra physical body) should be returned to

their maker. How is this done? The prayers of the Geh Sarna ritual do the work of cutting the link between the Ruvan and the physical body. The first three day's Sarosh ceremonies succeed in securing the safety of the Ruvan from the evil spirits which may attempt to kidnap it in a vulnerable state. The placing of the physical body in the Dokhma and its eating by the vultures and subsequent excretion through the vulture's digestive system breaks up the physical body to its basic parts (Anasers). The ceremony of Daham Yazad on the dawn of the fourth day and the Sun's rays then lift these basic parts and pass them on to Ahura Mazda ( not directly but this is a highly simplified version). The specific Talesam of the Dokhma, which was created by the performance of the Tana ceremony during its construction secures the release of the ultra-physical parts. Finally, the Pad Ruz ceremony (called Uthamna) on the dawn of the fourth day lifts the Ruvan and sends it on its onward journey to Chinvat and beyond.

You will now realize the folly of giving away any organ or donating the body by a Parsi. Such an act would cause IRREPARABLE harm to the Ruvan of the deceased. It will halt the onward progress of the Ruvan in a very retrograde manner, and put a spoke in the wheels of the ongoing march to Frashokereiti. It is beyond the power of any words to describe the spiritual harm this act can cause. Kindly avoid taking this step out of misplaced sense of charity. Like I said, one can only give away that which belongs to us. Clearly from the above, it is seen that nothing in our body belongs to us. So we cannot "donate" anything. It would be more akin to stealing.

Secondly, we need to understand that our misplaced act of "charity" may actually be putting a spoke in Nature's work. Parsis believe in the concept of action-reaction. The present state of a person is totally due to his/her past deeds. While a blind person certainly does require our help and understanding, we cannot play the part of God and try and restore his vision. That prerogative belongs only to God. We can definitely help him in other ways, such as improving his economic standing or getting a good job for him.

Thirdly, the parts given to us by God are for our own use. Could you understand the implications of a person misusing the eyesight given by your "gift" of a cornea? Would not some part of the evil committed by using that organ also flow back to its original owner? We cannot totally absolve our self of that responsibility. And even though the donation may happen after our death, the ill effects would have to be borne by the Ruvan, thereby halting its own progress.

Finally, some Parsis believe that the existing conditions at Dungerwadi and the absence of vultures has resulted in the failure of the Dokhmenashini system. They therefore feel that it is better to go for some other method of disposal such as donating the body to medical research. While it is absolutely true that the absence of vultures has somewhat damaged the system of Dokhmenashini, from the above discussion we can now realise that the Dokhmas are not only for the disposal of the dead body. They are also the engines which will fuel the onward journey of the soul. Even though the vultures may not be present, the primary agent - the Sun is still available in abundance. also the Talesam of the Dokhmas (although damaged by the criminal acts of photography and entry of un-authorized persons into the Dokhma) is still working and is the only thing which will enable the Ruvan to rise on the dawn of the fourth day after death and begin its flight to Chinvat. Hence the irregular working of the system today is not an excuse to take the law into our own hands. We are aware that a large part of the money we pay as taxes is wasted by corrupt officials and bureaucracy - does that mean that we have a right to stop paying taxes? No. And the same argument works for the Dokhmas. The system is bleeding, but we have to carry on with it till the arrival of the Saviour.

In conclusion, therefore, please do not let public campaigns and good looking stars sway our minds. Following the tenets of our religion is more important than any other thing. A hasty step or indiscretion can result in a nightmare for us after death.

Ervad Marzban J. Hathiram

## **So what about blood transfusion and donating blood?**

Roj Hormuz Mah Ardibehest, 1377 Yz.

We have seen in the earlier post that there is a very critical spiritual reason which totally prohibits any kind of organ transplants or body donation. A reader has posed a similar question with regard to blood donation or blood transfusion, which is very common today.

The major difference between organ transplants and blood donation is the fact that blood is a renewable resource in our body which is produced and destroyed on a daily basis.

Hence accepting blood transfusion or donating blood can be considered keeping mind the following specific safeguards.

1. In case of an elective surgery, or when the date on which the blood will be required is known, all hospitals provide for the facility of **“Autologous donation”**. In this method, the patient himself donates his blood at regular intervals, which is stored and then used on the day of the operation. Doctors prefer this method because there is no chance of rejection of the blood nor is there any chance of any infection. Parsis should definitely use this method. Let your Doctor know that you are aware of this process, and they will allow it, subject to other medical requirements being met.
2. In case the patient cannot adopt this method, then close family members should donate their blood and they should **INSIST** with the doctor/hospital/blood bank that only this blood should be used. A little gentle persuasion can help.
3. In case even if this option is not available, then only as a last resort, blood from unknown donors should be taken.

It might be of interest to readers to know that in the past, it was the practice in America and other countries to separate blood donations on the basis of race, ethnicity, or religion, or to exclude certain groups from the donor pool on those bases. Unfortunately this practice has now been discontinued on the fake “equality” and “non-discrimination” grounds. (see Wikipedia: “Blood donation”.)

4. Finally, it must be remembered that transfusion of blood also transmits some elements of the other person into us, which may remain in the body till the donee blood is regenerated by our body system.
5. After accepting blood transfusion, or after a visit or stay at a hospital, it is **MANDATORY** to take a SADU NAHN before entering an Agiary or Atash Behram or taking part in any religious ceremony (even a Jashan at home).

Those Parsis who wish to donate blood must bear in mind the following:

1. It is preferable to donate blood only if it is to be used immediately. Should the blood be stored, and unfortunately the person were to pass away before the blood were used, some spiritual load would come to bear on the Ruvan since blood is classified as "leelo Nasu" that is, "wet spiritual pollution", which must be reduced in the Dokhma within the first three days of death.
2. Persons undergoing this procedure must necessarily have a bath or preferably a Sadu Nahn after the procedure and before entering an Agiary or Atash Behram, or taking part in a religious ceremony.
3. Do not let a misplaced sense of "charity" cloud judgement, which can result in spiritual regression. It must be noted that, puncturing of the physical body (or even operations) does some amount of damage to the ultra-physical bodies (Keherp, Ushtan & Tevishi).

It goes without saying that Mobed Sahebs who tend the Sacred Fire in Agiaries and Atash Behrams, or who perform Pav Mahel ceremonies need to maintain very strict laws of purity. Such persons should totally avoid donating blood and in case of accepting blood transfusion, should take the Bareshnum Nahn again.

Ervad Marzban J. Hathiram

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This topic was discussed in great detail not too long ago.

Religiously we cannot donate any body parts.

The reasons, in short:

1) We are not simply our physical body. The Avesta teaches (*Yasna 55*) that we are made up of 9 components, 3 are spiritual and therefore not subjected to "death"; 3 are semi-spiritual and these do change although they are not completely left behind by the soul at "death", and the last 3 are physical which we leave behind at "death". "Death" is defined in the Avesta as "*viurvisti*", meaning a transition and not complete annihilation!

The 9 components are:

Spiritual: *fravashi, baodang, urvan*

Semi-Spiritual: *keherp, tevishi, ushtan*

Physical: *azda, gaetha* and our *tanu*, the body we see.

It is maintained that the soul, *urvan*, is immortal! So we do survive "death" in our semi-spiritual and spiritual components and even while here on Earth, we do have our existence in all these 9 components as these are interrelated and they co-exist! We cannot exist without the *fravashi*, or the *ushtan* or the *gaetha* or any of the body components missing! And therefore, we are an aggregate of all these 9 components!

It is a religious injunction that when one of our limbs is amputated, it must be consigned to the *dakhma* and given the mandated benefit of the religiously prescribed *khurshid nagiroshni*!

Taking this teaching a step further, if we have to consign even a limb to the *dakhma*, what about the other parts of our “self”? *Gaetha* means the organs! So, can we donate the *gaethas*? No! These are also essential to carry with us to the *dakhmas* because the 4 days’ ceremonies are dedicated to Sarosh Yazad who is in charge of our spiritual as well as physical existence! Without the organs, “*gaetha*”, we give only a part of ourselves back to Sarosh Yazad for His keeping! If it is mandated to consign our body parts (amputated limbs) to the *dakhma*, are we supposed to let our organs, *gaetha*, be left behind, donated or are we to take these also within the *dakhma* at death to be given the mandated *khurshid nagiroshni*? The organs are as important as the parts of our physical body while alive and even at death.

When we go on a journey and our baggage is held up, don’t we feel the discomforts? Similarly, when we go back to the spiritual world without all our parts in tact, we have discomfort and we wait for the donated parts to return to us. This stops our spiritual progress in the next world till we get our missing donated parts back.

When we donate our organs, the karma of the receiver and our karma get combined. If someone were to misuse my donated eyes, I will also suffer because the cells which are the essence of Life in the donated eye, is still mine although someone else is using it!

2) Donation of body parts does not mean we prolong Life! And therefore, as Zarathushtis, we should not donate our organs! **Till modern surgery and organ donation gained practice, did we let people die because we wanted to?** Were we cruel then? No! Life is **energy** and hence it is beyond the realm of empirical science! Life is spiritual and Life arose from Ahura Mazda who is Merciful and Just! There is no “death” meaning an end to Life because Life as energy **cannot** ever be terminated! There is Life in the next world, that is, in the spiritual world, which we do not “see” or “hear” due to our physical restrictions. But Life is eternal and death and birth are events in the spiritual cycle of Life! Hence, we cannot claim to be more merciful or just than Ahura Mazda Himself! Our physical body is full of wear and tear and therefore it cannot last forever and HE knows what is best for each one of us! We do not suffer because HE makes us suffer; we only suffer from ourselves! In almost every *ha* of the Gathas, it is mentioned that we suffer according to our deeds only and from nothing and no one else!

Hence, we are not being kind when we donate an organ; we are not omniscient as is Ahura Mazda and HE is All Knowing, All Powerful and HE is in everything, even in a grain of sand! HE is within us and around us! HE knows what is best for us and so, it is really not “kindness” that should describe organ donation. It is our mistake to try and take over HIS Justice, HIS Kindness and HIS Immutable Rule of karma, of why certain things befall certain individuals.

Hope this answers your questions. By the way, even the Jews are against organ donation and that is why they are so opposed to the suicide bombers because then the body parts of the Jews are irretrievable and they too believe in facing God with all their body parts in tact!

Sincerely,

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