

forbidden to purchase an organ from China since many human rights groups accuse the Chinese government of stealing these organs from their hosts.

The opportunities for abuse by unscrupulous people abound. Mohammad Saleem,

from New Delhi, India, was looking for work on the street one day. He was stopped by a stranger who offered him a construction job in a private home for a few dollars a day. When Saleem arrived at the given address, he was grabbed by armed men who

kidnapped him for a few days along with two other unfortunates.

The three were taken to a secret operating room where they were put to sleep. They woke up in tremendous pain and were informed that their extra kidneys had been

removed. Saleem screamed, "How will I live without a kidney?"

Despite the worry that it will cost him his life, Saleem later publicized his story. Doctors checked him and found that one of his kidneys had indeed been removed. ■

“Use My Organ in Good Health”

Donating Kidneys To Save Lives

Asher Labin donated his kidney so that another person could live. His selfless act is especially noteworthy since he is a frequent contributor to *Zman*. Therefore, not only do we get to hear the inside story, but Asher's keen journalistic insight and artistic flair delivers it with a rare emotional depth. As powerful and dramatic as his personal story is, along the way he highlights the *mesiras nefesh* of others who inspired him and who he inspired—people who literally gave of themselves to save others.

- Shimon Rosenberg
- Asher Labin



We often hear stories of people who risked their lives to save others. How often do we hear of someone donating an actual part of his body to save the life of another?

Meet Asher Labin, a writer who has had articles published in *Zman* in the past

(including the cover story of our very first issue about the Jewish boys imprisoned in Japan).

Labin has interviewed many people over the years who were involved in kidney transplants, both donors and recipients. This time, though, in a unique journalistic

twist, he offered up his own kidney on the altar of the operating room table to save the life of a fellow Jew he had never met before. And he was kind enough to share his story with *Zman*.

"It's not only my story," Labin emphasized to us. "I am recounting the story of many of my colleagues, kidney donors, Jews who have only one kidney but a heart overflowing with *ahavas Yisrael*, love for fellow Jews."

Labin was helped by an organization—Renewal—dedicated to educating potential kidney donors and matching them with needy recipients. Renewal then accompanies the donors through the entire process to ensure their needs are fully met. According to Renewal's founder, Menachem Friedman, Renewal arranges roughly 30% of all altruistic kidney transplants (i.e. donated to strangers as opposed to a family member) performed in the United States!

Join us, then, for the story of how Asher Labin, with the help of Renewal, gave literal life and hope to others.

Good News and Bad News

Mill Basin, Brooklyn, 2012

It is a routine day for the Sendzischews, a quiet Jewish family in the upscale Mill Basin neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. One could imagine Mill Basin as an offshoot of the elegant Italian city of Venice that somehow found itself supplanted in the heart of bustling Brooklyn.

The Sendzischew home has been restless lately. A dark pall hangs over Reuven Shlomo, who works as an accountant at the New York branch of the Discount Bank. Mrs. Sendzischew is a dedicated nurse who provides therapy for children suffering from asthma. Their only child, Yisrael, is a bright young boy who is the hope and joy of his parents.

Lately, Reuven Shlomo has been unusually weak. Just recently he lost his breath and fainted. He has undergone various medical tests and now he and his wife and their 11-year-old son are waiting to hear the doctor's verdict. Is it "the big C"?

Sendzischew tries to put on a smile and push away the black thoughts that interrupt him incessantly. He must remain strong for the sake of his family. As he sees it, difficulties and trials are not meant to destroy one's life but to strengthen a person's character and raise his awareness of the deeper meaning of living.

Reuven Shlomo Sendzischew has already experienced his share of troubles. He was orphaned at a young age when his father, Yisrael Yakov, z"l, was killed in a tragic accident. The trauma shook up young Reuven Shlomo, an only child. He fought a long uphill battle until he at last merited creating his own Jewish home and landing a good-paying job.

His parents were the children of Holocaust survivors who married in the displaced persons camps in Germany. His grandparents were respected figures from Chassidic communities across Galicia and Poland, such as Bendin, Sossnowitz, and Ushpizen (the town that later became infamous as Auschwitz). Says Sendzischew, "My mother's parents married in the DP camp and they lived together for 60 years. My grandfather rescued a *tallis* during the war, a *tallis* from his former home. That *tallis* became his *chuppah*. He *davened* in that *tallis* and he was buried in that *tallis*."

His father, Yisrael Yakov, was himself born in a DP camp. He went on to study in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin and settled in Brooklyn. Yisrael Yakov Sendzischew was a respected *ben Torah* and businessman. After his tragic death, young Reuven Shlomo was forced to work hard to succeed in yeshiva. Eventually, he found his *bashert* and settled down. He studied business and finance and landed a good job with Discount Bank in Manhattan.

Everything seemed to be going well for Sendzischew. Recently, though, he began dozing off at important strategy sessions at the bank, overtaken by an unexplained weakness and fatigue. Sendzischew is active in the Jewish community of Mill Basin,

serving as treasurer of the Flatbush Park Jewish Center, where he puts his business talent to work. Even the energetic young rabbi of the center, Yisrael Perelson, couldn't help noticing how lethargic his dedicated treasurer seemed at a recent board meeting and he asked carefully about his treasurer's health.

Now the situation had worsened. The problem climaxed one *Shabbos* when Sendzischew could not catch his breath. Hatzolah of Mill Basin showed up and promptly drove him to the hospital. The doctors discovered that Sendzischew was suffering from serious kidney problems. This was not surprising news. For years, Sendzischew had known about issues with his kidney, but now matters had come to a head. His kidneys could not clean out his blood properly, and as a result his body was accumulating toxic waste. His health was heading downhill fast.

The doctors ordered more testing. During one intensive screening they noticed a suspicious spot, possibly a sign of cancer.

Now the family sits and recites *Tehillim* nervously as they wait to hear the results of the biopsy. The ringing of the telephone shatters the quiet. Yisrael runs to answer, calling out a moment later, "Daddy, it's the doctor."

Sendzischew takes the phone while his wife runs to lift the other receiver. The doctor reports in a monotone, "Mr. Sendzischew, I have bad news and good news. Which would you like to hear first?" Frightened, Mr. Sendzischew asks, "What's the bad news?"

"Well, the bad news is that your kidney is functioning at such a low level that you will need to go on dialysis. The good news is that the spot is not cancerous—you will live!"

"You will live—you will need to go on dialysis" ...what an oxymoron. Dialysis affects the quality of life of the patient drastically. Most of the time it is nothing more than a drawn-out death sentence. The Sendzischew family rejoices at the good

news and then braces itself to deal with the bad news.

Mr. and Mrs. Sendzischew are knowledgeable enough to understand what dialysis is without having dealt with it directly before. But for their son they would need to explain everything on a very simple level: "The kidneys work as a filtering system that cleans out the entire body. All of the blood flows through the kidneys and they purify it. The pure blood is returned to the heart and arteries while the waste is expelled from the body. That's what the kidneys do. Dialysis takes the place of the kidneys when they do not work. The person is attached



Mill Basin's large *shul*, the Flatbush Park Jewish Center.



Rabbi Yisrael Perelson (right), rabbi of the Flatbush Park Jewish Center.