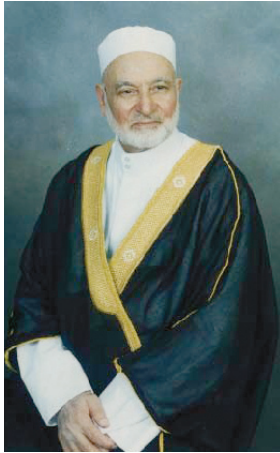


## “AN ORGAN DONATED IS AN ONGOING CHARITY”

By Sheikh Omar S. Abu-Namous,  
Imam, Islamic Cultural Center of New York,  
New York City

The fourth in a series of articles about organ donation and religion, written exclusively for ON THE BEAT.



One of the five fundamental purposes Sharia (the Islamic Law) is intended to serve is the preservation of life in all its forms. Animal and plant life is included; therefore it should not be destroyed without good reason. In the hadith (utterances) of Prophet Muhammad, a prostitute was forgiven by Allah (God) because she gave a drink of water to a parched dog in a waterless place. Another woman was consigned to hell because she shut up a cat in a pen and deliberately withheld food from it until it died. Whenever an

army set out for battle, one of the orders given by the Prophet was “...nor fell any trees...”

If Islam is so much concerned for animal and plant life, how much more would it value human life? “Take not life, which Allah hath made sacred,” the Quran ordains, “except by way of justice and law...” Chapter 6, verse 151. And consider this graphic portrayal of the supreme value of human life in Chapter 5, Verse 32, “...whoso slays a soul not to retaliate for a soul slain, nor for corruption done in the land, shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether; and whoso saves the life of one soul, shall be as if he had saved the life of mankind altogether.”

Suicide is also an illegal form of destroying life, and therefore is categorically prohibited. Chapter 4, Verse 29 enjoins, “...nor kill yourselves, for verily Allah hath been to you Most Merciful.” The same message is expressed in Chapter 2, Verse 195, “...and cast not yourselves by your own hands in destruction, but be good-doers, Allah loves the good-doers.” The Prophet made more particularized statements. In one of them he said, “He who hurls himself to his death over a mountain will be in hell hurling himself for ever and ever; and he who sips poison to take his own life shall be in hell sipping his poison for ever and ever; and he who kills himself with an iron implement shall be in hell stabbing himself with his implement for ever and ever.”

No wonder then, with this forceful pro-life spirit in mind, that Islamic juristic academies and fatwa (juristic opinion) bodies in the Muslim world, including the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences based in Kuwait, are agreed on the permissibility and

lawfulness of donating organs to patients whose survival or cure vitally depends on them. Their decisions were taken more than two decades ago, but were not disseminated on a large scale. Optimally, they recommended, the organs should be obtained from newly deceased persons, on the basis of wills donating their organs, the consent of their families, or, in case of unidentified persons, permission by the attorney general.

Islamic institutions also decided that it is lawful for living people to donate organs under the condition that their life or safety should not be endangered. Should a donor die from the excision operation, a rare happening, he will die as a martyr due to her or his noble intention to save a life.

In conformity with the fact that man is honored by Allah and is born free, they decided that bodily organs cannot be commercialized. Yet a minority of jurists, in view of the perpetual shortage of available organs, was inclined to allow remuneration to encourage the donation process. In order to stem rivalry and prevent an indigent patient being deprived of a needed organ, they recommended that payment be made by an official institution.

This altruism is based on the general attitude of all monotheistic faiths that man should be a giver rather than a taker in order to guarantee happiness in the Hereafter. “And seek, with the means which Allah hath bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter... and do thou good as Allah has been good to thee...” the Quran urges in Chapter 2, Verse 272. An organ donated is an ongoing charity that will continue to be rewarded as long as the donated organs live.

Sheikh Omar S. Abu-Namous became Imam of the Islamic Cultural Center in November 2001, after having joined the Center in 1998. From 1980 to 1998, Mr. Abu-Namous was Imam-at-Large and a lecturer on Islam. The Islamic Cultural Center is located on Third Avenue in Manhattan.

Previous articles in this series were written by Cardinal Edward Egan, Archbishop of New York; Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., Senior Minister, The Riverside Church of New York City; and Rabbi Dr. Moshe D. Tendler, Professor of Medical Ethics at Yeshiva University, New York, New York.

THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED IN “ON THE BEAT,” A PUBLICATION OF THE NEW YORK ORGAN DONOR NETWORK, VOL 6. ISSUE 2, 2003,