"The Sikh religion teaches that life continues after death in the soul, and not the physical body. The last act of giving and helping others through organ donation is both consistent with and in the spirit of Sikh teachings."

Lord Singh of Wimbledon CBE, Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations, UK (endorsed by Sikh Authorities in Amritsar, Punjab)

The Sikh faith stresses the importance of performing noble deeds. There are many examples of selfless giving and sacrifice in Sikh teachings by the ten Gurus and other Sikh:

“Guru Har Krishen, our eighth Guru, gave his life helping sufferers during a smallpox epidemic. It is entirely consistent with his spirit of service that we consider donating organs after death to give life and hope to others... in my family we all carry donor cards and would encourage all Sikhs to do so.”

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Donating one’s organ to another so that the person may live is one of the greatest gifts and ultimate sevs to human kind and hence Satguru says:

“How do I become a donor?

If you decide you would like to become a donor on your death, you need to join the NHS Organ Donor Register to ensure your wishes are recorded. Discuss your decision with those closest to you so that they are aware of your wishes. Adding your name to the register is simple and quick:

You can register online at organdonation.nhs.uk
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Organ donation and religious beliefs

A guide to organ donation and Sikh beliefs

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Sikhism and organ donation

Organ donation

Organ donation is the gift of an organ to help someone else who needs a transplant. Hundreds of lives are saved or improved each year by organ transplants.

Organs that can be donated by people who have died include the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas and small bowel. Tissue such as skin, bone, heart valves and corneas can also be used to help others.

Donation is an individual choice and views differ even within the same religious groups.

Why is it important to think about donating organs?

With medical advances it is now possible to use transplanted organs and tissues to enhance the life chances of those suffering from a range of terminal conditions such as renal, liver and heart failure. More people than before now have said that it helps to know some good has come from their loss.

When can organ donation take place?

Doctors and their colleagues are committed to doing everything possible to save life. Organs are only removed for transplantation once all attempts to save life have failed and after death has been certified because their heart has stopped. Certification in these ‘non-heart beating’ donors is also by doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

Care and respect

The removal of organs and tissues is carried out with the greatest care and respect. The family can see the body afterwards and staff can contact a chaplain or local religious leader if required.

Sikhism and organ donation

The Sikh philosophy and teachings place great emphasis on the importance of giving and putting others before oneself:

“Where self exists, there is no God. Where God exists, there is no self.”

Guru Nanak (founder of Sikh faith, and first of ten Gurus), Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Holy Scripture)

Sikh Gurus devoted their lives for the benefit of humanity and some even sacrificed their lives looking after the welfare of others. The Guru Granth Sahib says:

“Within this world take the opportunity for selfless service to others; then in divine abode we get the chance to be.” says Nanak. “The Eternal will embrace you.”

Seva or selfless service is at the core of being a Sikh: to give without seeking reward or recognition and know that all seva is known to and appreciated by the Eternal. Seva can also be donation of one’s organ to another. There are no taboos attached to organ donation in Sikh nor is there a requirement that a body should have all its organs intact at or after death. According to Sikh the soul migrates in a perpetual cycle of rebirth but the physical body is only a vassal in its long journey, left behind each time and dissolved into the elements, as the Guru Granth Sahib says in Aasaa Mahala 5:

“That time, which the mortal does not wish for, eventually comes. Without the Eternal’s order the understanding of mortality is never understood. The body is consumed by water, fire and earth. But the soul is neither young nor old, O human, thus it is the soul and not the body which continues its journey.”

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