

# The Value Of Life: National Association Of Chevra Kadisha Holds Breakfast In KGH

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Guest speaker Rabbi Paysach Krohn

Every day in the *Modim* paragraph of *Sh'moneh Esrei*, we thank Hashem for life that is in His hand. Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, founder of the National Association of Chevrah Kadisha (NASCK), spoke at the NASCK breakfast on Sunday morning, January 29, at the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills.

Rabbi Zohn welcomed the crowd and began by thanking the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills, Rabbi Yoel Schonfeld (*rav* of the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills), and Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld (Rabbi Emeritus), for hosting the event. He also thanked the Yeshiva of Central of Queens for use of the parking lot for this event. In addition, he thanked all of the sponsors of the event: Main Street Bagels, Chazaq, the Vaad Harabonim of Queens, NASCK, the Forest Hills Care Center, and the *Queens Jewish Link*.

Rabbi Zohn introduced Rabbi Yoel Schonfeld. Rabbi Schonfeld began with a personal thank you to the *chevrah kadisha* for all they did for his mother who was *nifteres* two weeks ago. He noted how, at a *bris milah*, we all stand up for the baby, and at the end of life we stand up for the *niftar*. He pointed out that in the beginning of life we are saluting the baby, so to speak, wishing him well on his journey and on accomplishing his mission. At the end of life, we salute the *niftar* and look back and see how he accomplished his mission. What distinguishes the Torah community is how we treat the *meis*. He spoke about a convert who decided to convert because she saw the tremendous respect Jewish people showed to the *meis*.

Next, Rabbi Zohn shared that the goal of the event was to focus on life and for everyone to fill out a halachic living will. He urged participants to take copies for others. He taught that the Torah perspective on life is so different from the secular world's view of life. He then introduced the guest speaker, Rabbi Paysach Krohn, mohel, author, and speaker. Rabbi Krohn shared a teaching in the Gemara that a person is fortunate if he is always concerned with what the future brings. He wants to see the fruits of his actions. Yerushalayim was destroyed because people didn't plan ahead and act when they should have. During the tragic story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, none of the rabbis stood up to say that it was wrong to embarrass someone. Rabbi Krohn acknowledged that no one wants to talk about death or a life-threatening illness. He quoted Rabbi Zohn: "The Torah world's view of life is that every moment of life has infinite value."



Rabbi Yoel Schonfeld

On the other hand, the medical world's view of life is based on quality of life. Rabbi Krohn shared a personal story about his mother's last day of life, when she held tightly to the *lulav* and *esrog* that her nephew, Rabbi Yehuda Gutman, helped her to bless. She wouldn't let go and then she kissed them. She was teaching the important lesson how even on the last day a person can accomplish so much. Every moment is so precious. His mother was teaching that on the last day of life it is important to serve Hashem with love and joy. The value of life doesn't stop until the last second. So how can we take away life prematurely? Rabbi Krohn then quoted a famous teaching brought down by the Shelah HaKadosh that people used to kiss matzah and marror and the four species.



Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, founder of the National Association of Chevrah Kadisha (NASCK), with Yaakov Serle

Rabbi Krohn then spoke about Rav Simcha Lefkowitz who suffered a stroke at a young age and lost the ability to walk. This rabbi was comforted by Rabbi Nachum Dessler, who taught him a teaching in the name of the Chofetz Chaim. We say the blessing every morning thanking Hashem for the ability to walk. "Hashem, You establish the steps of men." When a person is born, Hashem determines how many steps that person will take. The fact that Rabbi Lefkowitz lost the ability to walk meant Hashem loved him and wanted him to live longer.

Rabbi Krohn shared a story about a young woman whose husband was seriously ill. She had to make a decision about her husband having a dangerous operation. The doctor suggested she consult with someone. She told the doctor she was going to consult with Rav Moshe Feinstein. The doctor was surprised that she wasn't consulting another doctor. He went with her to see Rav Moshe. Rav Moshe asked to see a photo of her husband from 20 years before, when her husband had been his student. He saw the photo and cried. The doctor then said he understood why she consulted with him, since he could cry over a student from 20 years ago. Rav Moshe said that her husband should have the operation and also that he should say *brachos* out loud so that people could recite "*Amein*." *Amein* has the same *g'matria* as "*mal'ach*," which is an angel. We create angels with each recitation of "*Amein*." Rabbi Krohn urged everyone to say blessings out loud and have people say *Amein* and to say *Amein* to others' blessings. Rabbi Krohn shared how we want angels to protect us and we want to prolong life. In fact, this man's life was prolonged for another six years.

Rabbi Krohn then shared how Yaakov asked Hashem to make people sick before they died. The *midrash* teaches that if a person dies without being sick then he doesn't have time to set his matters with his children. Yaakov was the

first to get sick in the Torah. We must plan this before we get sick. We don't want doctors to make decisions.

Rabbi Krohn also spoke about the need to plan where we wish to be buried. We need to talk about these decisions. Rabbi Krohn noted that if a person has five daughters and one son, then according to the *halachah* the inheritance goes to the son, unless there is a plan. It's the best thing to give a gift while you are still alive. He spoke about the need to prevent arguments later. Everyone needs a *halachic* legal will. Also, a person can determine in his will which *tz'dakos* he wants to contribute to when he is no longer alive.



Rabbi Krohn then proposed the idea of creating a video of parting perspectives. In this video parents can tell children what they feel is their children's potential and the life lessons we hope we have imparted in them.

Rabbi Krohn concluded that NASCK is worried about the future of our families. There should be no *machlokes*. We must be prepared.

Following this moving *shiur*, Rabbi Ilan Meirov, Founder of Chazaq, stirred the crowd with a beautiful story and message:

There was a retired widower rabbi who lived in Petach Tikvah. His children and grandchildren were taking care of him. One day he became deathly ill. He was gasping for breath and he asked his grandson to bring him tickets to a non-*tz'nius*-oriented show.

The grandson was shocked and disillusioned about his grandfather. Later, he learned that his grandfather and his grandmother had bought all the tickets to this show to prevent others from going to see it. They went to the Steipler Rav and asked if they had done the right thing. The Steipler said that though they were not obligated to do this, they should take these tickets to the *Ribbono shel Olam*, because these were their tickets to *Olam HaBa*.

Rabbi Meirov concluded that we must put our wishes on paper to prevent misunderstanding or *machlokes*.

The last speaker, Rabbi Zohn, thanked all the other speakers, as well as Rabbi Meirov and Yaniv Meirov for their help with the TEAM Traditional End of Life Awareness Movement and this event.

He spoke about the idea of an ethical will. This is a way to let our children know what is important to us. He then shared that *Chazal* tells us that Hashem created man (Adam) alone. The Gemara says that the reason is that a person should say that the entire world was worth it just for me. We need to recognize the greatness inherent in each of us and the greatness of a moment in this world. Rav Moshe Feinstein taught that even a second of life can purchase eternity. Every morning when we recite *Modeh Ani*, we are thanking Hashem that we are still alive and that Hashem returned our soul to us. This blessing is meant to invigorate us to appreciate life no matter what the challenges are that we face.

Rabbi Zohn taught that every moment of life lived appropriately is a ticket to eternity. The more difficult life is, that creates a more powerful ticket.

The Jewish view is that the value of life becomes more valuable when things are difficult. This is opposite of the pervading worldview, which defines life by quality of life alone.

If a person's life is intentionally ended a second earlier, that is considered murder.

Rav Henschel Leibowitz *zt"l* taught: "Who can put a value on a moment of life?"

Rabbi Zohn added: “Life is life, even life lived at a most uncomfortable level.”

The program ended with participants filling out living wills.

*For more information, call 718-847-6280 or visit [NASCK.org](http://NASCK.org). The Florida office number is 561-376-9972.*

***By Susie Garber***