

One Gift: Many Ways to Save Lives in Israel

June 14 marks International Blood Donation Day. It is intuitive to all that in Israel, donating blood is a vital lifeline for all Israelis, taking a voluntary donation of a pint of the most precious lifesaving substance and giving it to an anonymous recipient whose life is in jeopardy.

Heart to Heart is proud to participate in providing material resources for Israel's national blood bank in partnership with ministries all over the country to save lives among all Israelis. We celebrate all Israel's blood donors, and we are grateful to those who help us provide the resources to make this possible.

Few know, however, that Israel's national cord blood bank, housed at Israel's national blood bank, is responsible for the collection, testing, and storage of stem cell units to help save patients suffering grave illness, both in Israel and throughout the world. These stem cells are taken from the umbilical cord and placenta following a live healthy birth, saving lives in a unique way.

Since 2002, more than 5000 cord blood units have been stored in the cord blood bank. The number grows every year.

Of these, more than 40 units have been genetically matched successfully and been used for stem cell transplant, saving lives in Israel, and dozens of countries all over the world.

One thing that makes Israel's national cord blood bank special is that the diversity of samples stored resembles the unique diversity of Israel's population, the fruit from the Jewish people's returning from exile in the four corners of the world, where we intermarried among different ethnic groups, and creating unique genetic samples that only exist in Israel.

Also unique is that a strong effort is made to gather samples from Israel's Arab population, creating one of the most, if not the most, sophisticated cord blood bank for the Arab world as well.

In 2009, a Swedish newspaper published a modern blood-libel accusing Israel of killing Arabs to harvest their organs. That same year, a match was found at Israel's national cord blood bank that was sent to Sweden, to save the life of a little boy of Arab descent. No more vivid story debunks lies about Israel, and highlights the sanctity of life that exists in Israel, and is embodied in the national cord blood bank.

Cord blood banking is unique because it collects blood rich in stem cells from what would otherwise be medical waste following the birth of a healthy baby, and without the ethical problem of aborting an unborn baby to gather stem cells. Every unit of cord blood stem cells stored means one less unit that needs to be taken from an abortion.

In developed countries, it's common to offer private cord blood banking services as a business, and to save a baby's cord blood in case of a grave medical problem within the baby's own family. It's like keeping stem cells in a safety deposit box, just for use by the family making and paying for the deposit.

Israel's national cord blood bank is special because it is free, and it is public. There are no fees to collect to test or store the blood. Moreover, the unique genetic profile of each unit is shared on databases internationally, to be able to save lives of severely ill people all over the world.

Worldwide, more than 20,000 stem cell transplants from cord blood have taken place, successfully treating people with more than 80 different diseases.

Even more exciting, research and development in this relatively new field of medical technology is progressing

rapidly, with the potential that in the future this may provide treatment and cures for damaged organs, and for those suffering from strokes, spinal cord injuries, and even diseases such as Parkinson's.

We all know that God's promise in Genesis 12:3 is unbreakable. "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you." But the scripture continues, "And all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you." While Israel blesses the world in so many ways, nothing depicts this better than lives being saved around the world by the generous donation of stem cells following the birth of a healthy Israeli baby.

Please help us process and store each unit, expand the participation among other Israelis, provide the space and equipment to outfit a state of the art facility to save lives in Israel, and from Israel worldwide, for generations to come.

Through Heart to Heart, you can sponsor a unit of cord blood for \$2000, enabling the national cord blood bank to do more, saving more lives.

You can also sponsor a unit of whole blood for just \$100, or the components of a unit of blood for \$60, \$40 or \$25. Please join us and share this opportunity with others.

Jonathan Feldstein is the director of Heart to Heart, a unique virtual blood donation program to bless Israel and save lives in Israel. Born and educated in the U.S., Feldstein emigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He writes a regular column for Charisma's Standing With Israel. You can contact Jonathan at firstpersonisrael@.