

LETTERS

Dear Mr. Tell,

For many years now, we have been receiving and enjoying the Las Vegas Israelite. From our vantage point here, it does a fine job of interesting and informing your readers.

My letter today is prompted by a recent article of yours about the autopsies being performed by the Hadassah Hospital without the permission of the families involved. As an Orthodox Jewess, AND a member of Hadassah, perhaps I can shed some more light on the matter.

The gist of your article is that you have always been led to believe that Judaism is founded on logic, and since you can find no logical reason against autopsies, you opt with science, FOR the autopsies.

Let me begin my reply to this by saying that logic is not necessary here to understand the feelings of the Orthodox Jews. If I told you that vandals had broken into a cemetery, overturned the tombstones, dug up graves and dismembered bodies, you would probably, without waiting for logic, be incensed. Why, then, is it hard to understand the revulsion of the Orthodox (or anyone else) to having their dear ones cut up, dismembered, or sewn together?

There is, however, a solution--one which would go a long way toward restoring peace between the opposing parties. That is, for the Hadassah Hospital to practice its pathology in accordance with Jewish Law, instead of in opposition to it. Judaism is not, as your article implies, opposed to, or in conflict with, science. And there are certain circumstances under which autopsies are permitted. In a case where a person had died from an unexplained cause, and relatives or others might be endangered, autopsies are permitted. (For a simple heart attack, or other obvious reason, autopsies are NOT permitted by Jewish Law, and also would not be of earth-shaking importance to Hadassah if they WERE performed.)

Besides these permissible autopsies, the doctors at Hadassah could also perform autopsies on the many non-Jewish people living in Israel who may not mind having them performed on their relatives. But to ride rough-shod over the feelings of their fellow-Jews in the name of medicine is not, in my opinion, the correct thing. All of us at Hadassah (myself included) are proud of Hadassah's many medical accomplishments. Those of us who are Orthodox in inclination, and that is a great number, thank the Almighty for instilling much wisdom into the minds of doctors, nurses and technicians. But let us remember that autopsies alone were not responsible for all the progress, and taking the time to sit down and iron out certain difficulties or complaints may not necessarily impede their progress.

I would like to make brief mention here of two points of Jewish Law which you seem to need a little more clarification on. The first is your statement that "meat and milk do not mix well" -- you used that as an example of the logic of Judaism. The simple truth is that, according to Jewish Law, the laws of kosher food are part of a group of laws known as "Chukkim." These are laws for which no reason is given in the Torah. Although those of us who observe these laws derive benefits from it (we feel) we do not observe them because of the reason you gave, or any other, except that the Torah commands it. The danger in giving such an explanation to a child, is that as soon as he sees people eating a hearty roast beef dinner followed by ice-cream, and he observes that they don't become physically ill, he will conclude that the laws of the Torah are untrue and inapplicable.

The second point is your statement that "it is only a rabbinic injunction anyway" that prohibits autopsies. Rabbinic interpretation is very important to traditional Jewish law. According to tradition, when the Torah was given at Sinai, not only the Written Torah but also an Oral Torah was given to the Jews. The latter was transmitted by word of mouth from father to son as an integral part of the Torah and was finally codified many years later to become the Mishnah and the Talmud. Without this Oral law, traditionally taught by the rabbis, we could not understand the laws. Without

this rabbinic tradition, you would not be cognizant of the fact that meat and milk ought not be eaten together -- for the Torah only states: "You shall not cook the kid in the milk of its mother."

I know this letter is rather lengthy, but I felt impelled to write. Any part of this that you see fit to publish in the Israelite would be appreciated, since it may help to answer questions about Judaism's basic values that may have been raised by your article.

Again, my commendations to you on a fine and enjoyable newspaper,

Sincerely,
Blanche Gewirtz
(Waterbury, Conn.)

(ED. NOTE: Thank you, Mrs. Gewirtz for comments on the Israelite. I believe it is better to observe laws with logic, rather than because the Torah commands it. As for autopsies -- if the learned doctors at Hadassah Hospital consider autopsies necessary, that is good enough for me. J.T.)

Dear Mr. Tell:

In response to Mr. Acker's challenge to document "the story," as reported in your column in the Las Vegas Israelite 2/4/72, please advise him to read: I Maccabees, chap. 2, verses 29-38.

Yours truly,
M. Soloff
(Rabbi, Los Angeles)

Mr. Jack Tell

Dear Sir:

"If the story is fact, document it" he challenges! MAYBE the enclosed will help you to do JUST THAT hopefully!

When I read your article I knew it was true -- I had read it somewhere!

In re-reading it today, I remembered where I had read it so I started searching and found it with my notation (on p. 347) "they wouldn't fight on Sunday - THEN - now they do!" So I kept going backward, all through II Maccabees - FINALLY, p. 160, I Maccabees.

This is in appreciation of your sending me your informative paper all these months.

(ED. NOTE: Then follows three pages of direct quotes, J.T.)

So more power to you! Keep on Keeping On! You are doing a wonderful job!

Surely hope this helps you, with your challenger! It will, at least prove that you've read it -- probably in your own (Torah?)

The Christian Bible, I understand, is taken from Jewish (Hebrew) Scriptures. Maybe the apocrypha is in yours. The Catholics, at Nicene Council, 325 AD I believe, deleted it from other Scriptures. I, personally, think it more -- well, I like the wording better than our regular Bible.

Well! I'll hush! Just wanted to share this information with you -- for your kindness to me. "May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You" and yours.

Respectfully yours,
Claire Burrus
(Henderson, Nev.)

Dear Mr. Tell:

Thank you for calling to my attention my oversight in not including the information that I am a lecturer in the Department of Classical and Oriental Languages.

I find it unfortunate that you seem to unequivocally expound a concept of scientific progress that does not necessarily guarantee a high standard of ethical behavior. The view that the ends justify the means is quite un-Jewish. Medical research ought never to serve as a reason for disregarding the dignity of the human being. Recent European Jewish history is a tragic witness to this distortion of human values.

Mr. Tell, your concluding paragraphs in the Feb. 4th issue of your column indicate that you misunderstood the entire issue. Autopsies without the consent of the next of kin are being contested not autopsies per se. The Halakkah provides for autopsies under certain conditions. "The learned and dedicated men and women associated with Hadassah" are not ALL committed to a concept of human dignity consistent with Jewish tradition. The disposal of human organs in garbage cans can be documented by reliable sources in Israel. An unbiased investigation may lead you to conclusions other than those you now accept as correct.

For the record, I "scored" you for your understanding that there are logical explanations for ALL Jewish beliefs and practices. There are, indeed, logical explanations for many. These, however, need not be the actual reasons for these beliefs and practices. The Biblical law you cite may be understood in terms of hygiene. It is presumptuous to assume that Dr. Sacher's explanation is the reason for the law.

Finally, let me express my pleasure that you feel I inspired you

to re-read books you cherish. May I suggest that your reading include the works of Judaica scholars other than the Sachers. I hardly think that works of fiction such as "Exodus" ought to serve as the basis for editorial opinion in a newspaper.

Sincerely yours,
(Rabbi) Jerome Acker
(Lecturer, Classical and Oriental Languages, Queens College, N.Y.)

Dear Mr. Tell:

Thank you very much for the beautiful write-up. It is all true, but you made it sound like a story. Very flattering indeed. My family and of course Nishon's thank you also.

Sincerely,
Sasha Semenov

Dear Mr. Tell:

I am pleased to send you the 40th Anniversary issue of "THE BULLETIN," Volume

Dear Mr. Tell,

Please accept my belated thanks for printing my letter in your January 14th issue, in re: the Beth Sholom Seniors Club. It evoked many comments and brought in several new members, showing good coverage your paper receives. It was learned that many people would like to attend the meetings of the Beth Sholom Seniors Club, but are unable to come, due to lack of transportation.

President Fay Cohen has arranged with a driver who has a limousine seating 12, to pick up and deliver back to their homes such persons, at the small cost of 75¢ both ways. A telephone call to Fay at 452-1958, leaving your address and telephone number and she will see that you are put on the pick up list. If you have a one-way ride, it will only cost you 50¢.

The Club invites all seniors, 55 yrs. of age and over, to come to Temple Beth Sholom at 1600 East Oakey Blvd, every Monday at 1 p.m. You will find refreshments, friendly people, interesting guests and a movie short the last Monday of the month. Non-Sectarian.

Thanking you,

Sincerely,
Edith Robbins,
Secretary, Beth Sholom Seniors

The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear President Nixon:

I am writing to you as one of the number of Jews in the Soviet Union for whom the main purpose in life is service to the people and devotion to the cause of strengthening and prospering our Motherland, the State of Israel. Together with many others, I am deprived of the chance to realize this cherished dream.

In February 1971, approximately one year ago, I applied for an emigration visa, despite the numerous obstacles deliberately placed in my path. As always, I find myself in an atmosphere of persecution and suffering.

I appeal to you, Sir, as the head of a great nation whose principles are founded upon the humaneness and the sense of justice of the great Thomas Jefferson, to do what is in your power to help me leave for my Homeland, Israel.

With deep respect,

(signed) Garick (Gavriel) Shapiro
10 Chakalov St. Apt. 11
Moscow
tel. 130-52-63

Dear Jack:

Muriel and I are back in business at World of Beauty, the new May Co., Laurel Plaza, 6100 Laurel Canyon Blvd., No. Hollywood, Cal.

We hope that some of our Las Vegas friends

40, No. 1, 1972, which proudly lists your name on page 18 as a member of our Advisory Editorial Board, greatly enhancing our publication.

Your cooperation was a source of great inspiration to us in preparing this volume devoted to the 40th Anniversary of American Friends and summarizing one of our most trying and one of our most successful years ever.

I know that you will be gratified by the interest that this issue of "THE BULLETIN" will evoke around the country among its readers.

With warm regards and many thanks, I am, as always, sincerely,
Your good friend,
Issachar Miron

(Editor, "The Bulletin, American Friends of the Hebrew University")

will drop us a line or phone us when they visit Los Angeles.

Very kind regards,
Al Kirschner

SUPPORT YOUR LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE NOW IN ITS 8TH YEAR